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Philippe Malouet

Philippe Malouet

Philippe Malouet, né à Paris le 22 juillet 1952, est un écrivain et un journaliste français.

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Il a également écrit des scénarios pour des films et des documentaires.

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STRANGE WATERS.

A Novel.

BY

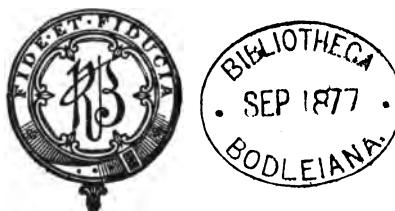
R. E. FRANCILLON,

AUTHOR OF

"OLYMPIA," "PEARL AND EMERALD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

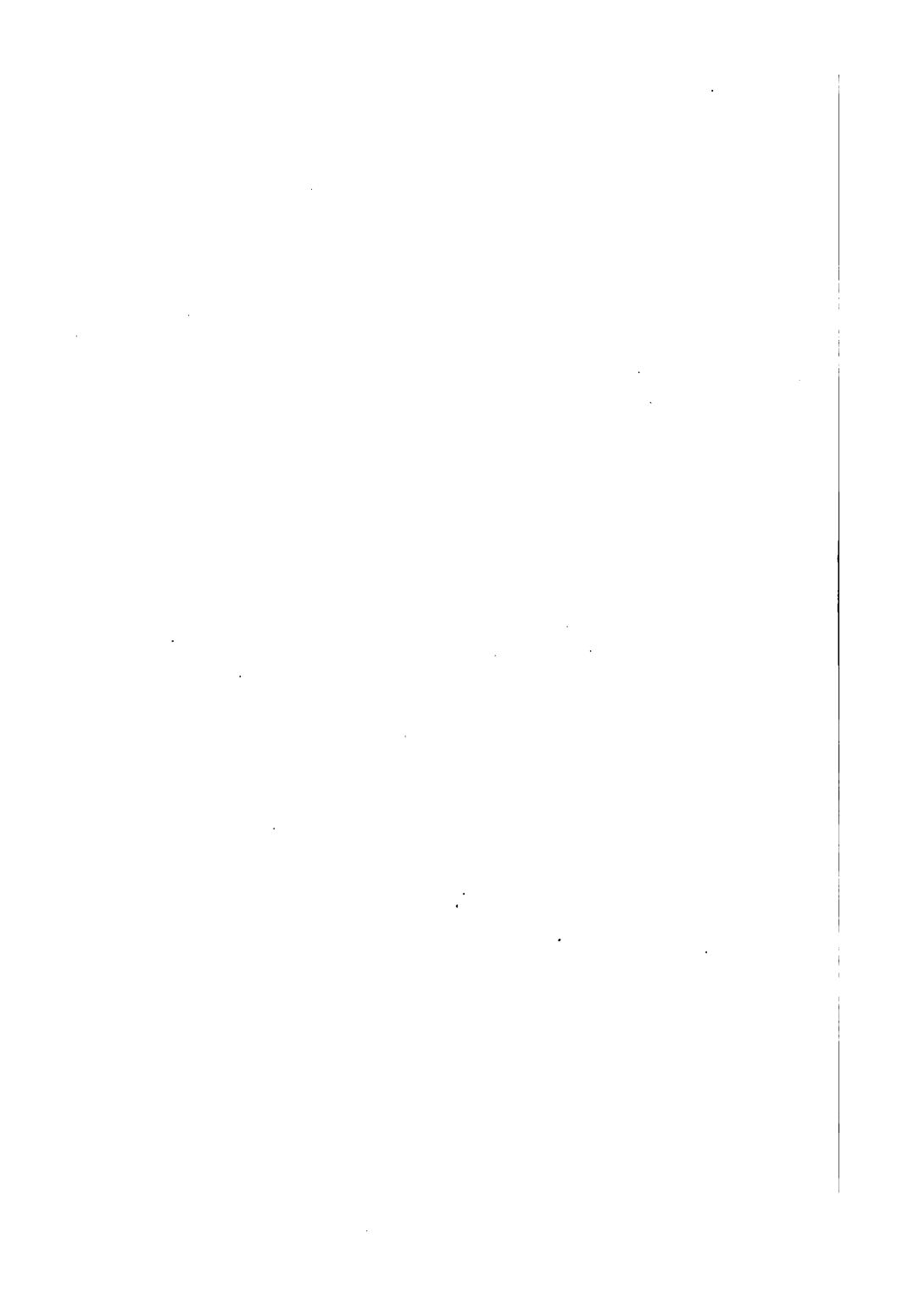


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STRANGE WATERS.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

GOING HOME.

It had been with a not altogether light heart that, when the time came, Celia had to leave Lindenheim. She had been there three whole years, and had never so much as dreamed of going home. From year's end to year's end she had lived at the apothecary's at the sign of The Golden Lion, in a round of hard work and quiet pleasure, till it was Deepweald, and not Lindenheim, that became the dream.

It never struck her as strange that her father never sent for her to see him. His ways had always been so different from what she now learned were the ways of other men

that it would have struck her as very strange indeed if he had done in anything what any other man would have done. She drew no comparisons ; and, as almost every one of her fellow-students stood upon some abnormal relation to his or her own family, domestic eccentricities were the order of the day.

He had written to her now and again, though without any regularity ; but, after her first vain and barren attempt to write to him, he exacted from her the most minute weekly record of how she employed every moment of her time, and not only of her studies. She had begun faithfully. But presently—and without the least intention or thought of suppression—certain little incidents began to drop out of her diary. There had always been a secret undertone of sympathy between this ill-matched father and daughter, but never confidence ; and confidence does not spring up so quickly, or even so surely, as one of Lord Quorne's cucumbers—or certain other gourds. He had taught her to be shy, and to set up a barrier of reticence between even her own right and left hands. How could she possibly write to John March catalogues

of the land-parties to Waaren and elsewhere, of the chatter of a parcel of boys and girls, of the thousand and one little interests into which she fell, but that would want a far more practised and more fluent pen than hers to make even intelligible ? It would be like offering a handful of daisies to a lion—or a bear. And so it came to pass that the name of Walter Gordon was among the trifles that dropped out of her diary. And the chatter of her friend Lotte was another—and, in short, everything that makes up life, to which work hardly ever belongs. Let the hardest student think, and—unless he be another John March—realise how little time and thought his work takes up compared with the merest everyday trifles.

So Celia had duly chronicled her singing of ‘*Infelice*’ at a students’ concert, only omitting, out of shyness, the praise and the envy that it gained her ; but she had never mentioned the receipt of a bunch of violets, though it had interested her ten thousand times more. Nor—for how on earth could she explain what she did not understand ?—her plighted friendship with Walter Gordon.

It seemed so natural, and yet so strange ; so easy, and yet so unaccountable.

It was at least two months after her troth-plight to an eternal flirtation after the sense, or nonsense, of Lindenheim, that Lotte said to her, in her little room at the Golden Lion :

‘ It is time you should tell me something about your emotions, Celia.’

Celia understood German very fairly by this time, but the question puzzled her a little.

‘ My emotions ?’

‘ Of course. I want to compare them with mine. Do you know, Celia, I’m not altogether satisfied with my own. If I like yours better, we’ll change emotions for a little while.’

‘ By all means,’ said Celia. ‘ I should like some emotions very much indeed. Are they really so pleasant ?’

‘ Now, that is Herr Walter all over ! As if you didn’t know very well. Really, my dear child, there is something very extraordinary about you. You have been months at Lindenheim, and you have not only been

constant yourself, but the cause of constancy in—Herr Walter. Do you know what I should say if we weren't in Lindenheim ?

‘ What ?

‘ Why, that Herr Walter is downright in love with you—over head and ears—the real thing. Only, of course, that's impossible.’

Celia flushed rose-pink, as girls do who have heard of Love but never seen him.

‘ There !’ cried Lotte, clapping her hands together. ‘ If that isn't just charming ! Oh, if I could only have an emotion again that would come like that, it would save me in rouge for ever so long. But, you see, I've had so many. Do, please, tell me how you feel.’

‘ Very well, thank you,’ said Celia.

‘ Oh, you English ! You haven't got an impulse in you—not a sentiment even. I used to love, oh, passionately, when I first came to Lindenheim. I never could hear the name of Walter without turning as red as a boiled lobster and feeling my heart beat till I was afraid for my stays. Of course I'm desperately in love with him still, only it's more sentimental ; but it does enrage me to

see anybody else taking first love as quietly as one's first music lesson. But it can't be—isn't your heart beating—wildly? No,' she said sadly, after placing her hand over the muscle where poets have chosen to locate the passions. 'No; it is absolutely calm. I am disappointed in you, Celia. I thought it would be so nice to have a rival I liked, instead of that odious Ilma. It would have been so delightful for us to be jealous of one another together, and agree upon what we were to feel. Do tell me what you think of Herr Walter, Celia.'

'I like him very much indeed. He is very kind to me, and I am very grateful. You and he are my two friends.'

'Celia, you are a downright goose out of heaven. It's your feathers that Dame Holle shakes down at Christmas. It's my belief that you're a great deal fonder of Herr Walter than I am—there! I know what's English for kindness and gratitude. It is "loaf," my dear child.'

She sighed sentimentally, and then laughed like a wise woman of the world—of Linden-heim—at nineteen.

Nevertheless, Herr Walter was very kind, and Celia was very grateful. He had opened the windows of her life, and let in the sun ; how much they needed opening he might guess, but could not know. He gave something more than mere human interest to her days, and kept his word in the matter of constancy. And the least touch of sympathetic human interest was a revelation to a girl who had been taught to look upon the whole round world as but a pendant to a church organ, and as a dead body to be inspired by an as yet unwritten score for voices and full orchestra.

He gave her a great deal to wonder at and to remember, besides that talk on the way to Waaren and that other talk on her way from her first lesson. Very few days passed without his bringing life into her round, and so putting heart into her work and her waking. He cultivated an acquaintance with the apothecary's family at The Golden Lion, and very often spent an hour or so there before joining the good company that met later on at The Stadt Dresden. He broke up the Quakers'-meeting character of the school con-

certs by sitting next Celia and her chaperon. He gave her flowers and chocolate. It was all according to the strict code of Lindenheim etiquette, save in the matter of constancy ; and there was nothing about it all that would be called lover-like anywhere.

No doubt Herr Walter liked the relation, or it may be assumed that it would not have continued. She could feel and understand the kindness of heart that first drew the leader of Lindenheim society to throw the shelter of his friendship over the shy and friendless new girl. It was not his fault that the first rose of May in her heart should be made to bud under his sunshine. However little the sun may think of the rose, the rose must needs think a great deal of the sun. That infinitely delicate thing without a name, that is in no sense love, but might be love, that feels itself without thinking, that enjoys itself without knowing—that perfume without blossom, music without notes, that is nowhere possible, save in some days of spring and some hearts of girls—had already come to her ; and how was he to know ? And yet he must have felt the fragrance of it a little,

or he would never have become so intimate with the apothecary at The Golden Lion.

But he had left Lindenheim with a promise to write, and had kept his promise to the extent of two long and three short letters. That was a great deal for a man who had left Lindenheim for Rome. The 'Good-bye' was perfectly simple—it was only tacitly understood that their student-friendship was to last for ever. The matter-of-fact Celia believed it; she would have believed it no more fully had the understanding been sworn to. She had no theories about friendship, and assumed that 'once' in all cases means once for all.

Of course she missed Herr Walter. Nay, she was so eccentric, for a Lindenheim student, as to remember him. But it was not as we miss what we lose. He had left her a legacy. And this was an infinite faith in the sunshine. Her heart crept a little back into itself, in its mouse-like way, but she had her work left, and an assurance that there was silent sympathy with her somewhere in the world.

And then Lotte left Lindenheim. And

then, at last, it drew near to her own time for leaving. She had written to her father to tell him of the approaching end of her course, and to ask him what she was to do. For all answer she had received these few lines :

‘ Dear Celia. Don’t wait. Don’t take your diploma. You must not be labelled. Arrange to return instantly. I shall expect you daily.—J. M.’

No eccentricity from home surprised her, even though in the present instance it obliged her to travel alone from Lindenheim to Deep-weald. That was not a matter likely to trouble a man who never had more than one paramount idea, and to whom details—save in his score—were nothing and nowhere. But the sudden summons told her that it was not an easy thing to leave Lindenheim, even to go home.

What a strange experience is always that same ‘ going home ’

After even a short absence, when many things have happened, it is a mixture of desires and presentiments not always of the most comfortable kind. When we are fairly

away from it, home is just as mere a shadow as strange countries are when we are at home. For three whole years, from girlhood to well-nigh womanhood, Lindenheim had been home to Celia. It contained all her real interests, however guilty she might feel in owning such a thing. She had not seen her father. She could picture him well enough, at will, drawing thunder from the organ, or toiling at that never-ending score ; but he had become almost like a dream of childhood, and not of a kind that people like to dream over again. The grim, grotesque incarnation of gnome-like labour, living apart from his kind in the gloom of a house that must surely be haunted and saturated with ghosts of half-born harmonies, fell like frost over the Saxon Arcadia, with its free, frank life, its youth, its hopes, its sympathies, and its sunshine. She could have remained there contentedly, she thought, all her life long ; going home was like leaving home. And then there were more things to leave behind in Lindenheim than were actually there. That lilac-dream was bound up with Lindenheim ; it seemed to refuse transplantation to

Deepweald. Going home was like going back to childhood—and slavery.

But, after she once found herself in the English railway train, came the desires and the presentiments in force ; Lindenheim was falling back for awhile into dreamland. What change would she find ? She was not the same Celia. She found herself contemplating her old self as from an outer point of view ; and, if she even to herself had changed so much, what would remain unchanged ? Could her three years of transformation have passed over her father without a sign ? She had the illusion of Lindenheim on her that she had grown old there ; so what must her father be ? The old names and associations grew up before her oddly. While she had been turning into a woman, as she thought, was Mr. Gaveston still reading the same poems to the same fifteen representatives of St. Dorcas ? was Mr. Swann still cracking the same jokes ? was Mrs. Swann still snoring the self-same snore ? It was hardly possible ; even Deepweald must surely have been spinning round in some way all this while. And, if not, she would be

coming home among them all as a stranger, bringing with her unknown experiences, no more intelligible at Deepweald than the Laureate's poetry had been three years ago. After all it would be less strange to meet Herr Walter in the flesh in front of the Shire Hall than to see the cathedral tower where it had always been.

And yet, there it did stand. She had never thought of noticing it before ; but now the sight of it made her nerves thrill and her heart beat as it had not beaten under Fräulein Lotte's experiment. She came back one autumn afternoon. Nobody had met her—no doubt her father was adding a semiquaver to his score. It looked very gray, a little grayer and older, it seemed to her, against the pale blue of the sky. The elms were turning brown, and there was the quiet keenness in the air that comes before the leaves fall. The rooks were coming home early. How unspeakably, strangely familiar it all was, and at the same time how unspeakably strange ! The very gravel of The Close looked oddly ; and there was her house of bondage—

Flutteringly, almost timidly, she got out of her fly and knocked at the door. Not so timid had she felt at her own father's threshold when she had disobeyed him for the first time by hearing Mademoiselle Clari sing. She felt terribly alone, and missed Herr Walter here, where he could not be, even more than at Lindenheim.

The door was opened by a slovenly girl, who stared at her and her luggage.

‘Where is my father?’

‘Eh, ma’am?’

‘I am Miss March,’ Celia had to explain. ‘Where is my father? Is he at the cathedral?’

‘No, ma’am—miss. He’ll be in the study. He don’t go to church now.’

‘Is he well?’

‘He’s much like as mostly. You’ll find him in there.’

She left her luggage to take care of itself, and opened the study-door. The room had changed as little as the cathedral, except that the old litter had grown into tenfold confusion, and that its stale cloudiness seemed to speak of the pipe and the score, not indulged

in at odd moments, but at least four-and-twenty hours a day, or more if they could anywise be squeezed in. And what did the girl mean by saying, 'He don't go to church now?' Even as Celia entered she heard the chanting of afternoon service through the closed windows.

There he still sat at his battered escritoire, the dwarfish, broad-shouldered figure of the organist, as if he had never stirred from it for three years. He must have been absorbed in his score indeed, for neither her knock, nor the crunching of the fly-wheels on the rough gravel, nor her entrance into the room disturbed him. In the far-off old times she would not have dared breathe disturbance when he was so deeply occupied. The force of revived habit came upon her, and she stood waiting—hardly knowing whether she yearned to throw her arms around him or whether to creep quietly upstairs and cry.

The scratching of the pen still continued. She could bear it no longer, and at last, without moving towards him, said, in scarcely above a whisper :

'I am come home.'

She had learned to write the word 'father,' but she could not speak it for the first time.

'I am come home,' she said a little more boldly. But the scratching still went on.

Presently it stopped. 'I am come home,' she said a third time, so that he must hear. But he did not turn round.

An awe fell upon her. She had been away so long, and there was a weird feeling about the dim room and the silent, motionless figure, and for an audible background, the dull chant outside.

'Father!' she cried out for the first time since she was born. But she could not have moved a step towards him for the world.

The pen went on again. Another chord was added to the score.

Something terrible was growing out of this petrifaction of time. Had he really sat there so long as to have become but an incarnate score? She knew not after how long, but at last he rose and turned round.

'Celia!'

Her own name in that voice like a deep organ stop opened all the gates of the old life, and woke up the room. As little as she could

have moved towards him before could she keep herself now from flying to him—for the first time. But he held out both his hands.

‘Wait—are you in time? Don’t speak. Sing.’

Celia was used to eccentricities too well, and had grown to gather too much systematic meaning from them, to imagine that during her absence her father’s brain had been affected by solitude and the score. She could well enough comprehend, knowing him, his anxiety as to the result of Lindenheim and his impatience to be satisfied. She looked for no signs of affection. But this welcome home was a little too cruel. She had found at least one thing in Lindenheim—a human soul; and it was too young and unfledged to be callous to wounding.

‘Sing, Celia,’ he said again.

Her arrival home in the autumn afternoon, her first sight of the gray tower after three years, her falling back into the old air, the lilac buds she had brought with her from Lindenheim, had already filled her heart to overflowing. It seemed swelling and choking her. Instinctively she thought of Walter,

who now seemed to personify all sympathy. Sing ! She could not speak even. She could not even cry till she could escape into solitude.

‘ You are not singing,’ said her father.

What was she to do ? Obedience was the first law of her nature. It came on her with double force because of her freedom. She could not sing ; but she made a painful effort, and managed to sob out the first few notes of *Infelice*. It was the first music that came to her.

He kept his eyes fixed on her. Did they give her strength, or did they only compel her weakness to seem like strength against her will ? There was no absurdity in the situation to him or to her. Mechanically she drew her breath harder to keep down the choking sobs and the ball rising in her throat, and forced herself to bring out the bare notes with the more power for the effort that it cost her. He still watched her lips, her throat, her eyes. Any one suddenly entering, would have thought it a piece of mesmerism or wizard-craft to see the organist, redeemed from grotesqueness by a power that forbade

any man ever to smile at him, forcing an unwilling voice from the girl before him.

He did not release her till she had gone through the whole scene from beginning to end.

‘I see you sing well,’ he said abruptly. ‘I think—I think I could have heard you seven days ago. Well, I waited too long.’

‘Good Heaven, father, what do you mean?’

‘The score is nearly finished. It won’t take more than a few years more, now. By that time you will be in your prime.’ He was speaking very calmly, in his deep voice; but there was a harsh tone in it, new to her, as if the organ-stops were growing out-worn—a sort of dull despair in it, far more moving than any outburst of passion would have been. There was affectation of stoicism, even harder to bear than the agonised tone in which, three years ago, he had made a long-forgotten prediction of the doom that was upon him; for she remembered that now, and understood all.

He had been giving up life, and all—as she had come to know—that life means, for the achievement of a perfect work and a perfect

voice that he who made them would never hear. A dumb orator, a blind painter, a deaf musician—which is the more terrible doom ?

Celia could only cry out and at last, with a full heart, fall upon his neck—his real child at last come home. Lindenheim faded into mist, and was forgotten ; here alone was reality. She broke into a shower of love and pity over the strong man who had done his best to crush her own life as well as his own under the altar of art that he had tried to raise.

He must have had a heart somewhere, and not merely a score. As she fell on her knees before him with her arms still round him and her tears falling she felt one warm tear fall on her face that was not her own.

CHAPTER II.

AT HOME.

CELIA's coming home, however, was an old story now—years old. She was once more a Deepweald limpet, with merely the brand of the Continent to distinguish her from her fellows. She needed some sort of distinction ; for, with a strange but far from peculiar form of perversity, the people of Deepweald, such as the Swanns and others, resolutely refused to see any change in Celia, unless it might be a little for the worse. She had always been awkward, shy, and plain ; so she was bound to be awkward, shy, and plain all her days. But of course having been on the Continent gave her a *raison d'être*, and her fellow-townspeople were the less in-

clined to grudge it to her in that she had no other, and was brought into rivalry with nobody.

But though this gave her a badge of distinction in the place which she, by force of early habit, regarded—always next to Lindenheim—as the capital of the world, the skyrocket of the conservatorium, for such she had become, had come down like a stick most lamentably. And she seemed likely to be stuck like a real limpet in Deepweald until that deaf fanatic, her father, had finished the last chord of his score. And when would that be? He had been at it for something like twenty years; and he still talked of a few years more. And until those few years more were over to the last hour, and the final chord ready for action, the voice of Celia was to be kept out of sight like a buried treasure over which, in legendary times, dragons were set to keep guard. She was not even to let herself be heard as a singing mistress—not even in Deepweald, where one must be heard sing very loudly to be heard of half-a-dozen miles away.

Was it genius in the organist, or was it

lunacy ? Celia, as a child, had looked on her father as the very incarnation of music ; but Lindenheim had considerably modified her views ; she knew not what to believe. Public opinion was more decided. John March had never been worth a halfpenny an hour as a teacher, and in point of fact his deafness did not make a farthing's difference in his value ; but nevertheless an overtly deaf music-master was a contradiction in terms, and Celia had not been at home a day before she found that the very small salary of the cathedral organist was all that the two together had to depend upon for a living. It was true that John March as yet had no professional rival in the place, but it was equally true that all his pupils had left him, and that a rival might be looked for any day in the natural course of things. And then the organist's pittance, however highly he might be thought of by the Palace and the Deanery, was precarious, as it became manifest that his deafness was past cure.

Surely it was time that Celia, fired with new-born filial pity for that fallen tyrant to whom she was really more closely bound by

unconscious sympathy than by emotional affection—surely it was time that she should turn her education to some use and, if he would not allow her to defy fortune as a concert singer, become herself his friendly rival. The same idea occurred to Mrs. Swann, who called on her within two days of her return and volunteered to start her effectively. But to every such suggestion the organist turned, both metaphorically and literally, two deaf ears. He never gave a reason to anybody but Celia; and so obstinate was he that the few who wished to be his friends set down his conduct as sheer lunacy, and the score as a monomania. And, rightly or wrongly, most people of the most ordinary common sense would naturally come to the same conclusion.

‘It’s odd,’ was Mr. Swann’s expressed opinion, ‘that a clever fellow like March should let that poor girl of his starve rather than let her go governessing. That isn’t pride, to my mind. It isn’t pride, when the wolf comes to the door, to ask him to dinner. It’s a case for two doctors and the county asylum, to my mind. Poor Celia—I always

had a sort of a kindness for that girl. What's to become of them when March loses his place, I'm hanged if I know. I wish we could do something for them ; I'd give her a stool in my own office, if she was a boy.'

'I might give her that old polonaise thing of Bessy's,' said Mrs. Swann, meditatively. 'But then she does pitchfork her things on so.'

'Does she ? I thought she looked quite neat and nice when I saw her to-day.'

'Yes, that's how men see things. She was always like that—pitchforked on, I mean. It's bred in the bone. However, we'll have her to dinner on Sundays, and welcome.'

'A growing girl wants more dinners than one a week,' said Mr. Swann. 'However, half a loaf's better than no bread.'

But, though Celia was asked to dinner on Sunday—without her father—and though the invitation was twice repeated, she did not go. She was beginning, after the first shock, to think ; and a girl fresh from life and triumph, and Lindenheim may be acquitted of unfilial unselfishness for shuddering, when she thought,

at the desert of life that lay before her. Even she, though she did not breathe such treason even to herself, was ceasing to believe in the completion of that interminable score. She had learned what the faculty of composing means, and how the greatest works have not demanded lifetimes. And yet she did not practically feel that he was the victim to an insane delusion. And so her life lay plain before her—to sacrifice herself to a dream because it was all that her father had left to live for ; to obey him, because his terrible misfortune exacted self-devotion more legitimately than his tyranny had done ; and to give him a little of the human affection that for the sake of a dream he had thrown away.

But obedience implied being idle, and the patient waiting for an end that was never to come. Happily for her she had not one atom of ambition in her whole composition—or unhappily, because, if she had, she would have been driven into wholesome rebellion and have refused to sacrifice her life for a craze, or, at best, a whim. But at last, as time went on, and when the last pupil left, a greater incentive arose to active rebellion even

than healthy ambition. The wolf was at the door. John March had not learned business in Deepweald Cathedral, nor had Celia studied domestic economy at Lindenheim.

And so it happened that, for old friendship's sake, she consented to give instruction to Bessy Gaveston. She told her father, but could never make out whether he understood it or no, or whether he made use of his deafness as a means of compromise between yielding at last to the supposed necessity of supporting what he monstrously called life, and his determination to give no express consent to a breach of the law that he had made. At any rate he would not understand ; and Celia was obliged to take silence for assent, for lack of any other. No doubt the organist argued, If my score needs the sacrifice even of my will, let even my will go.

It was in this melancholy condition of home affairs that Celia so unexpectedly met in the very High Street of Deepweald, where a stranger was a ten days' wonder, Walter Gordon.

However much she had fallen into the background of his mind, he was as freshly in the foreground of hers as after the walk to Waaren. She believed in the eternity of friendship, even though educated at Lindenheim, where loves and friendships are as the lives of butterflies—no less brief as no less bright and many-coloured. Was he not the only real man she had ever really known? For she had been faithful at Lindenheim to her pledge, the young men of Deepweald did not count, and her father was only an incarnate organ-pipe transformed into an incarnate score. He had given her life; and if anything more that he had given her was as yet but a mere thin phantom, those thin phantoms are notoriously strong. Seeing her thus suddenly and unexpectedly had brought back all Lindenheim even to him. But to her? No wonder that for full five minutes the English sun began to shine in German, and the perfume of old days blew back. All old days have their special fragrance, and with Celia they were violet-odoured. Once more she was the shy and awkward new girl walking beside a magnificent stranger across the

borders of a new world—a world where that Moloch, art itself, was nowhere.

She had dismissed him with almost needless lack of encouragement ; but she could not help wondering whether something more than mere chance had not brought him to Deepweald, and if so, how long the chain of chances was to be, or whether it was to end barrenly where it had begun. She felt troubled and excited—but the trouble was no pain. Was it Herr Walter's mission always to turn up, at all sorts of sudden times and places, when she most needed him ? If so, life would not look quite so barren and unsympathetic after all. On the contrary, there would be many an oasis in the desert for her.

But she looked for nothing immediate or tangible. And she had no presentiment, even when the girl, with her wages in arrear, announced a gentleman, name unknown, to see Miss March. She assumed it would be Mr. Gaveston, and her heart gave a leap when she thought of a possible cheque. It was Herr Walter. She had given him to understand that he was not to call, but his disobedience did not displease her. What

could be more natural than that he should call on his most intimate Lindenheim friend ?

“ I suppose you were hardly expecting to see me here, Fräulein Celia ? But, you see, where you are is Lindenheim .”

Celia smiled and sighed. She liked the speech ; but she was only too sure that where she was, was not Lindenheim.

‘ I’m staying at Hinchford—Lord Quorne’s —and I’ve been waiting for a chance of coming over again. We’re friends, aren’t we ?’

‘ I hope so,’ said Celia.

‘ Then let’s make believe we are at Lindenheim. You used to tell me everything there, you know, and I used to tell you everything—or any way, most things. I don’t think I used to tell you every time I went to the Stadt Dresden, or how much beer I used to drink there. Well, we’re wiser now. I want to know if you are really settled down to teaching in Deepweald ? I think I might be of use to you with Lady Quorne.’

He began to find her really very lovely to look at, and not only from a painter’s point of view—which, however, was not then so

opposed to general notions of beauty as it has since become. He was not a Deepweald man, and therefore not bound to believe that all people are branded at ten years old with an ineffaceable label.

‘I teach Mrs. Gaveston,’ she said.

‘Nobody else? Do you know, I can’t imagine your settling down here. It’s the old business of the racer and the dust-cart. I suppose you mean to go into the profession some day?’

‘No,’ said Celia, beginning to feel that it was less easy to give Herr Walter her whole confidence now than it had been at Lindenheim. ‘At least—at least, not for a long time.’

‘A long time? Why should the world have to wait so long for the Lindenheim Nightingale—the Nightingale aus England, you used to be called there?’ He added the postscript because he felt that somehow he had made a mistake in paying her a conventional compliment, and the reference to the Lindenheim phrase turned the edge; he was certainly learning a little truth about woman-kind and its ways from his elaborate studies

of Mademoiselle Clari : at any rate he had reached the second letter of the alphabet, which is—Never pay compliments except in war.

‘Perhaps never,’ said Celia, without the sign of a sigh.

‘But there is a perhaps, you see.’

‘Yes—I did tell you everything at Lindenheim. My father wants me to appear in his great work. I must wait till that is done.’

‘Well, that sounds all right. Why do you say “perhaps never?”’

‘I mean—I mean—well, it is a long time since we were at Lindenheim.’

‘You call it long ago—yesterday?’

They were following very divergent trains of feeling ; and they were landing in the wrong places, for in truth it was to her that Lindenheim was of yesterday, to Walter that it was long ago. But then she was feeling an instinct of reticence about all things, unconsciously aware that Mr. Gordon had ceased to be quite the same Herr Walter and that she had certain instincts of hero-worship to hide ; he felt that however she had changed she was still the very same Celia,

and was making him melt back into the Herr Walter that she was feeling he had ceased to be.

‘I’m afraid I haven’t done my duty in looking after you, Fräulein Celia,’ he said, with the real smile aus Lindenheim. ‘I remember all about your father, and,’ he added without the smile, ‘I have heard. Don’t you know how I sympathise with you—how I want to help you—if I may? Why else did you think I had come?’ He held out his hand; she took it frankly. They never knew from that moment how far apart they had been within two moments ago.

‘Then you know why I am here,’ said Celia.

‘Well—no. That’s just what I don’t know. With your gifts you could make a living for both of you—you might make a fortune.’

‘You don’t know my father. He would see me in my grave rather than enter on a career—except in one way. And then—I’m afraid you don’t know me. I might teach a little—but—no: I should never sing in public. I’m——’

‘What?’

‘A coward, Herr Walter. I nearly sank under the floor when I sang at Lindenheim.’

‘Ah! before friends and enemies? But you’d be bold enough before strangers.’

‘No; that’s just what I shouldn’t be. That’s why I’m content to wait for years. I want to learn to be brave.’

‘By not going into the water till you’ve learned to swim. But do you mean your father’s work is not to be finished for years?’

‘He says so.’

‘But what can it be, in the name of im-mensity? An opera? An oratorio?’

‘I don’t know. He doesn’t even tell me. He locks it up, and calls it the score.’

Walter’s face fell. The genius had im-pressed a man the more, and of a different order from the Swanns, with an idea of his lunacy.

‘And you—you,’ he said, his eagerness waking up at the thought of a real piece of injustice, ‘you are devoting your life to humour—to help—the craze—the idea——’

‘Of my father,’ said Celia, simply, ‘who is deaf, and is growing old, and has nobody to believe in him but me.’

Walter flushed more crimson than Celia at Waaren.

‘I see,’ he said. ‘But, all the same, it is a shame. He is sacrificing you and robbing the world. Celia—it never will be finished, that score. I remember, you told me the first day I ever saw you—you remember?—that even then he had been at it for years. Such works last men their lives, and are never born even at the end.’

Celia’s face was not given to express obstinacy. But it did now; and it was answer enough, without her saying:

‘It shall not fail for any fault of mine. He lives for this work, and has made me live for it too. I must not break his heart, Herr Walter.’

Walter did not say, ‘I should like to break his head;’ he only thought so. He felt very angry. It is true Celia had been practically out of his thoughts for years; but here was a new experience of her, and he knew not which was the stronger cause for righteous indignation, the culpable lunacy of a self-conceited organist, or the obstinate determination on the part of Celia to sacrifice herself on such

an altar. After all, had he not constituted himself Celia's guardian? And now was he not bound to be? What were the tiny perils of Lindenheim to those of Deepweald?

They did not speak another word for more than a minute—that is to say, for what seemed five. Celia was stubbornly feeling; Walter was thinking. And he saw the life that must lie before her as plainly as she could picture it, and with greater effect: for he did not see the infinite pity that lay at the root of her devotion, and made it the less bitter. He only saw the blank barrenness. He had never yet seen the organist; but he painted him in the air as an exaggerated development of the Genius—genius as recognised at Lindenheim—only petrified by provinciality and age. Celia, he was convinced, only wanted ambition and self-assertion to gain name and fame—unless, indeed, she married, and then, of course, Walter would be relieved of his duty. And, in his new impulse of rebellion against injustice, he did not wish to be relieved.

Suddenly he heard a deep voice—‘Celia.’ The organist’s voice had grown rather

harsher of late years. But it was still resonant with its effect of narrow power. Walter almost started. John March at the same time saw a stranger, and stared. Walter did not openly stare, though Celia's father resembled little enough the picture he had drawn.

‘Neither genius nor madman,’ he thought.

‘A fanatic—that is worst of all. Poor girl!’

The organist carried no trumpet. Celia wrote something for him in pencil on a slip of paper.

‘Walter Gordon?’ he exclaimed brusquely,

‘Walter Gordon?’

Walter bowed. ‘And a deaf fanatic,’ he thought. ‘One who is shut up alone with a dream! Poor girl! She must be saved from this, anyhow.’

Celia looked at him slightly but openly, as much as to say, ‘Go.’ He wished to remain, but all the chivalry in him was aroused, and he obeyed. He was twenty years old again. He had never expected to find in Celia a slave because she was a heroine. And somehow the father had thrown light upon the daughter—he was throwing himself after an

idea, and she seemed capable of doing the same. His knowledge of womankind was beginning to be at sea with a vengeance ; what with Clari's suggestions of unexplored depths of passion, and Celia's of unsuspected force of will, he seemed to have been fancying himself sliding on smooth ice, and to have just discovered it to be hot lava.

CHAPTER III.

‘YES.’

‘CELIA, who is that young man? You wrote down his name as—yes, here it is—Walter Gordon. What business could he have here with you?’

The deafness of the organist of Deepweald was no longer comparative. He was as deaf as a stone. Very deaf men can sometimes manage to hear familiar voices, but John March was deaf even to the voice of Celia. Even she had to communicate with him by writing. No wonder that he was more than ever possessed by one idea, and that his mind was filled by his own music just as his ears were, now and henceforth,—for they were closed to any other. She had to write

her answer now ; and it was not easy. Could he have heard her speak, she would have found it difficult to say who was Walter Gordon—a private memory of Lindenheim who had suddenly come to life again in Deepweald. But to write down the whole story in a few words, as fast as her pencil could move was a sheer impossibility. She was learning to write fast, but the process was still an effort to her, and half her trouble was employed in making her words easily legible.

‘ I—knew—him—at—Lindenheim.’

‘ Who is he ? What is he ? What is he doing here ?’

‘ I—do—not—know.’

‘ What has he been saying to you ?’

That was doubly impossible to answer.

‘ He—met—me—in—the—street. He—called—to—see—me. We—were—friends—at—Lindenheim. We—have—been—talking—of—Lindenheim.’

‘ And you don’t know who he is—where he comes from ?’

‘ No.’

‘ How is it you never spoke of him to me ?’

I don’t remember his name in any of your letters.’

He spoke anxiously; and indeed his great idea had never included in it one possibility with regard to Celia—that of a young man. It was likely enough, if he had the dimmest knowledge of the world, that the sudden appearance in his house of a handsome young man, an old and unheard-of friend of Celia, should trouble him.

‘I—did—not—think—he—mattered.’

‘Everything matters. I don’t choose you should have friends and acquaintances out of Deepweald. I don’t know who this Walter Gordon may be, and I don’t care. But I do care that—Celia, if this Walter Gordon calls here again you will not be at home. Write “yes.” Do you hear?’

Celia was longing to tell her father the whole story of Walter Gordon—how he had been something more than her friend at Lindenheim, how he had set himself to take care of her from the very day of her arrival there, how he had devoted himself to make life there safe and pleasant for her, how grateful she ought to be if he had not been too much

her friend for gratitude. All this could have been told in a very few easy words. But no wonder that the deaf are an unhappier race than the blind. The blind lose looks, which in eight cases out of ten mean nothing, and in the ninth case lie. But they lose nothing else. The deaf have only those meaningless or deceptive eye-glances whereby to learn and judge of all things; and as a substitute for the voice, which is the soul, have only barren signs or symbolic words. What can they know from a forced shout or a hurried scrawl? What can 'yes' or 'no' mean without the voice to put heart or light into them? To the deaf, passion can be but a mathematical formula, with some wretched x or y or z to stand for 'I love you.' The face is but an accident; the voice alone is the man or woman.

And so, instead of thinking aloud to her father about Walter Gordon, Celia had to think silently, and no clairvoyance enabled her father to read her unspoken words. There was a delicate fineness about all she thought and felt concerning Herr Walter that defied being put suddenly upon paper—

far more being extracted and concentrated into a ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ And yet no other answer than one of these was open to her. How could she argue or protest without any tangible reason to help her—with a lead pencil and a scrap of paper? And certainly she could not answer ‘no.’

She must answer ‘yes,’ then. For the first time she was conscious of tyranny. Life had already felt black enough, but this command was depriving her of her last dream of sunshine. For the last moments of his visit the old Herr Walter had come back again, and brought back to her the feeling of peace and sympathy that had once been inseparable from him. His companionship, though reduced to a bare chance every now and then, would prevent her from feeling altogether alone in the world while she carried on a passive, waiting struggle against the blank and lonely emptiness of her days. Was there to be nothing she could have and keep to herself? It was very hard, and she felt the tears come into her eyes.

But that was one of the things to which the deaf are not blind. John March had been

keen-sighted at the best of times ; at these, his worst, his sight had grown doubly keen and watchful. He had ordered Celia to deny herself to the visits of a young man, and, instead of writing 'yes' at once and obediently, as a matter of course, she was standing before him doing nothing though with pencil and paper in hand, and ready to cry, if indeed she were not crying. His heavy brows drew together ominously. He did know the world well enough to know of a certain phantom that has a way of interfering with great ideas and scattering them to the winds. After all, it must be supposed that he had been human enough to have learned such knowledge, however imperfectly, in some far-off day, or he would hardly have been the father of Celia.

Think of what a man feels who has laid out his whole life, step by step, and not only his own life, but that of another, as if he were playing a game of chess against the world, and then finds himself likely to be the victim of a fool's mate before he has completed his opening ! His deafness even was not so fatal as what seemed to be coming upon him now ;

and yet it was the old story. Many a more human father has felt the same. Such or such a career in life for son or daughter is planned with consummate prudence, all things go rightly, there is not a hitch or a loose screw or an unoiled wheel anywhere in the whole machine. Suddenly, from Heaven knows where, drops from the air upon the scene some new and undreamed-of He or She, and in the twinkling of an eye the Plan is—nowhere. Locksmiths are not the only people who are food for Love’s laughter. There might not be much in this, and yet Celia, that type of good training and pattern of docility, was doing all things, even weeping—at least he could see her tears—rather than write one simple word of three letters.

‘What is the matter, Celia? Are you crying because I tell you not to see Walter Gordon?’

All her delicate films of feeling, not love as yet tangibly, but rosy with the tint that comes from but one possible dye, were as if they had undergone a coarse rent when she heard herself charged with crying because she was not to see him. Pride rose up in arms;

injustice was upon her. Her tears had come, she knew, from a far more complex and deep-down fountain than anything so straightforwardly natural as that wherewith she had been charged. Perhaps her father was less wrong in his surmise than she knew—but then she did not know. Instead of either 'yes' or 'no,' she scribbled :

'I'm—not—crying. I—don't—care—about—seeing—anyone.'

'All the better. I want nothing more. Write "yes," then,' he said harshly.

'Yes.'

In spite of pride, a tear, full-blown, fell upon the paper as she wrote the word. It was not wholly because she had been signing the death-warrant of that poor ghost of comfort that her empty life had hitherto left her. Her father had been her tyrant always—that went without saying, and she was as much accustomed to tyranny as to the Cathedral tower—but he had never been glaringly unjust to her before. And injustice is harder to bear than cruelty. And what made it all the harder on her was that, had she delayed her signature but the space of one tear-drop more,

she would have saved herself from the literal expression of a promise that, despite all temptation, she would have to keep inviolably. For no sooner had ‘yes’ been written than she—but not her father—heard a knock at the door. It might have been attacked by a battering-ram, and the musician would not have heard.

‘And,’ he said, ‘that you will not stop to speak to him if you meet him.’ He was talking like a Turk or Spaniard to his daughter, and as if his experience in love affairs, whatever that of so ill-favoured a man may have been, had been drawn from anywhere but England. It was cruelly unjust to Celia; but then, ever since her memorable escapade in going to hear Clari years ago against orders, he had never trusted her. And that again argued ill for the character of that love-story which even the most ill-favoured share with their betters. It may be that as Celia grew up into womanhood she grew also into some suggestion of other deep, dark eyes that had been the windows of a less honest soul. But this time the ‘yes’ remained unwritten.

It was Mr. Swann who had thus far saved her. He was not a more frequent visitor than others, but he had always, from the days of St. Dorcas, retained a sort of one-third gallant, one-third jocular, and one-third fatherly interest in Celia, and would have been good-natured to her beyond the point of Sunday dinners had the impracticable organist allowed.

‘Good morning, Miss Celia,’ he said, bowing to the organist, who bowed again, with a dignified gesture, to a chair less littered than the others, and then went straight to his writing-table, taking his pipe and carrying it with him. He did not care to display his infirmity, which at any rate gave him the advantage which some sufferers from street concerts and home whispers will almost envy him of being able to work under all conditions unhindered, and so to lose no moment of time—solitary in the midst of full talk, and listening, undisturbed and undisturbable, to imagined harmonies.

‘I see March is as hard at it as ever. Well, it ought to be something A 1 when it’s done, to make up for the time. I’m come to

hear what Dr. Randal says of him. It was yesterday, wasn’t it ?

Mr. Swann had kept his old peculiarity of saying everything as if it were a first-rate joke ; his eyes twinkled even when he spoke gravely, as though his simplest question were a conundrum and his barrenest remark an epigram.

‘Yes,’ said Celia, ‘Dr. Randal did see him. And—’

‘I hope it was good news ?’

‘It was the very worst. He finds no hope—’

‘Nonsense, Miss Celia. While there’s life there’s hope, you know. But I’m sorry to hear that—very sorry indeed. One might as well be a land-agent on board ship as a musical man without ears. March ought to go to London.’

Somehow Celia thought that there was an increase of humour in Mr. Swann’s tone which, she now knew, meant increase of sympathy.

‘In fact, Miss Celia, he ought to go. I’ve got to say something to you, Miss Celia, that you ought to hear. You’re sure he can’t ?’

‘He cannot hear a word.’

‘So much the better. So much the worse, I mean. I heard something to-day from Gaveston—my son-in-law, you know, and cousin to Lady Quorne.’

‘Bad news, of course,’ said Celia. But she was not thinking of any new trouble that might be coming from the outer world. John March’s worldly knowledge had been considerably at fault when he had so conspicuously written ‘Danger’ over the head of Walter Gordon. Girls have fallen in love, over head and ears, for less reasons; and Celia was a girl after all, even though she was John March’s daughter, and only this terrible Herr Walter’s friend. Of course, as all the world knows, nothing is so easy as for young men and girls to be friends and to remain so—for a little while.

‘Yes, cousin to Lady Quorne,’ went on Mr. Swann, abstractedly. That was the family watchword, and was constantly cropping up whenever a Swann was in want of something to say. It stood for the weather. ‘And a singular woman—lady I should say—she is to be sure! Very unlike the late Lady

Quorne, my dear. Would you believe it, she drinks in public-houses and plays skittles—curious tastes for a countess, though no doubt it shows geniality and condescension, and all that sort of thing. It’s better after all than being stuck up, though I should have thought a countess would have preferred champagne and billiards. However, that’s another matter. I was talking of Gaveston. Well, it is bad news, and I’m sorry to be the first to tell you; but it’s better to have a pull and get it over. Gaveston had been talking to the dean—and the long and the short of it is, we’re to have a new organist. You see they can’t afford to pay an assistant for the sake of giving your father a sinecure.’

‘ They are going to dismiss—’

‘ No, no, Miss Celia—not quite so bad as that—“ dismiss ” isn’t the word at all. They’re going to ask him to resign.’

Celia had been expecting the blow; but her heart sank in her. Nothing terrible ever seems quite certain till it comes.

‘ My father no longer organist !’

‘ It does sound impossible. It does seem just like going to pull down the cathedral

tower. I shouldn't have the heart to do it myself, but then no doubt the dean and chapter wouldn't have the heart to turn off my head clerk if he went blind; and let me tell you that a blind land-agent is as bad as a deaf organist any day, and worse.'

'No doubt,' said Celia, without heeding.

'Now the first thing,' said Mr. Swann, 'is to get March to resign before he's asked to. The dean's speaking to Gaveston was a sort of a hint in that direction, and a nod's as good as a wink, or ought to be. That's why I say March must go to London. It'll be good reason for leaving Deepweald, and they'll pay him his half-year's notice, or whatever it is, without making bones. No doubt about that. And then the second is, I've got an idea for you. It does go to my heart, Celia, to see March slaving away at his work there, just like a post, when we're talking about this dis—— resignation. By the Lord Harry, one wants a lot of resignation in this world.'

Celia thought so too, and sighed sadly.

'But about my plan for you. Gaveston, my son-in-law, isn't a bad fellow, though I

say it, and knows Lady Quorne well—naturally, being his own cousin through the Horchesters. And Lady Quorne is a great musical gun, for all her skittles and beer. My notion is to get Gaveston to mention you to her, or get you an introduction—better still. He says she’s half like a foreign singer herself, and she’s been on the Continent, like you ; so you’ll get on famously, or ought to. She’s got some singer or other staying with her now, so they say—a queer thing for a countess, but I suppose they have a right to their whims, like other people. Yes, I’ll get you an introduction to Lady Quorne.’

The organist had not once turned round. He was either completely absorbed in his score, or made himself seem so. Well, indeed, might it go to Mr. Swann’s heart to see the musician deafly and blindly toiling on at his work, heedless of the outer world, while at his very back was going on talk about the climax of his ruin.

‘ You’ll know how to manage March,’ said Mr. Swann ; ‘ and I’ll know how to manage Bessy, and she’ll know how to manage Gave-

ston if she's her mother's daughter, as I take it she is ; and he'll know how to manage Lady Quorne, being her own cousin and a parson into the bargain. Let the parsons alone for managing women — all but their wives. Why, it seems but yesterday I came in at that Dorcas and found fifteen young women making love to him all at once. My Bessy got him, though !

‘ I—I must do something !’ cried out Celia, at last. ‘ I can do something—they said so at Lindenheim. I can’t see my father starve for the sake of even the score. He has let me teach Bessy——’

‘ Yes, and you may as well send in your account before you go. Send it in to me. Bessy’s lessons are my affair. You tell March what I’ve told you, and I’ll see Gaveston to-day. P'raps he’ll drive you over himself—if Bessy isn’t jealous about his driving a pretty girl all the way to Hinchford. My little grand-daughter keeps her at home, you know. I’d take you myself, but my dealings are with my lord, not my lady, and not much of them ; only if it wasn’t for me, he’d turn all his acres into cucumber-

grounds. Good-bye, my dear ; keep up your spirits and never say die. That's my motto, all my life, and it's a good one. They say my lady does say dye, though. Good-bye, my dear. I won't disturb March. Give him my respects, and tell him to come and take pot-luck on Sunday.'

The standing invitation had remained dormant for a long time ; but Mr. Swann's heart had really been touched, and he was one of those who believed that roast beef is a palliation for all ills. And so it is for the ill that was staring the organist in the face now, fairly.

‘What has he been saying ?’ asked John March abruptly, as soon as Mr. Swann had left the room.

Celia wrote : ‘There—is—to—be—a—new—’

‘A new organist ? I suppose so. Well—it will give me all the more time for the score.’

Could he really believe that manna would be charmed from the skies by toil ? It seemed so—even to Celia ; that he forgot the for-

feiture of his official residence, of the need of bread, and of all earthly things, even as he had forgotten a girl's need of love until to-day. But did even this amount to madness? Biographers of men of genius do not say so. They tell us of Columbus, of Palissy the potter, of Schubert, of Beethoven, of a hundred men who starved that they might feast on an idea. Celia had heard of such things; she was not altogether of Deepweald.

But, if that were so, all the more strongly she felt herself claimed by duty. Now that Mr. Swann was gone, she thought consciously of his suggestion about Lady Quorne—that strange, wild countess, of whose eccentricities all Deepweald, thanks to the wife of the curate of St. Anselm's, was full. She was a musician; and, by her position as an amateur, above the envy which, Celia had learned even at Lindenheim, is the alphabet of the musical profession. To Deepweald ears the very name of the Countess of Quorne was a name of power, and not the less because it had never done anything for the curate of St. Anselm's. If she intervened—somehow—all would be well.

Meanwhile John March returned to his task as if he had only been disturbed for a moment by the buzzing of a fly. Every day the habit of self-concentration grew upon him, until it seemed likely that his house, literally as well as metaphorically, might fall about his deaf ears without his being a whit the wiser.

Celia did not lay before him the name of Lady Quorne. She had already written one 'yes' too many, and her pencil refused to run the risk of having to write another. There must be some limit to obedience when a daughter sees her father on the brink of suicide, fanatic and tyrant though he may be.

CHAPTER IV.

‘NO.’

‘You are very solemn. Do you find me very difficult to-day?’

‘About as usual. This is only the tenth time I have tried to begin—that is to say, only my tenth failure. I tell you what, Mademoiselle Clari,’ said Walter Gordon, throwing down his brush in a temper, half genuine, half affected, ‘there is only one way to paint you. In the first place, there must be a great painter.’

Mademoiselle Clari smiled lazily—a new expression of a new mood. ‘He is great enough to content me.’

‘Ah, but that isn’t enough; though he were Titian and Raphael rolled into one. He

must fall in love with you—desperately, passionately, over head and ears.’

The prima donna smiled again ; but not lazily. The light, as it were, mounted up from her lips to her eyes, and then travelled from her eyes to her lips again. It was not a blush—the colour that came was not of warmth, but of light only.

‘That would be good. I think I would like to be loved desperately, passionately, over the head and all over the ears.’

‘And then,’ said Walter, with enthusiasm, ‘this great painter, this gigantic lover, must watch you for years and years, till he had caught you in the right mood with just the right look in you—and then——’

‘Paint me ?

‘No—kill you.’

‘Kill me ?’

‘Yes—stab you to the heart with one blow, so quickly that you would not feel and your face would have no time to change. Then——’

‘Then ?’

‘He would be able to study you at his leisure, you see,’ said Walter, thrusting his

hands deep into his trousers' pockets, and looking at her as if he had said the most matter-of-course thing in the world.

Mademoiselle Clari, always slow to take in a new idea, considered gravely. Then, at last, she smiled approval.

‘I would love that,’ she said, slowly and deliberately, as if she were dwelling lingeringly upon a pleasant flavour. ‘That would be a good way of loving—to be loved so that a man would kill me to keep me.’

‘For art’s sake, of course, mademoiselle.’

‘No—for mine.’ A passing frown. ‘I have nothing to do with art. I—I hate the name. It is ciarlatanismo—porcheria—humbug, what you say. I would not for art have one cut my finger. But—do you know, I think you know me a little?’

‘I’ve tried to, anyway. Ten times.’

‘No. Not that way. And not very much; but a little—yes,’ she added, reflectively. It was plainly not one of her intense days, but she was inclined for variety of mood. Perhaps she felt herself challenged to crowd as many expressions as possible into the smallest fragment of time.

‘Perhaps I know you better than you think,’ said Walter, betaking himself to his fallen brush again, though he had to do for himself what an emperor did for Titian. ‘I think you have a great deal of passion in you; so much that it makes you seem cold.’

‘You think so?’ She looked interested. Self was never an uninteresting topic to Mademoiselle Clari.

‘I’m sure of it. And then—then you have a temper. People generally have a temper who have very sweet voices and very sweet smiles.’

‘Yes, I have a temper,’ she said, very sweetly indeed; in a very sweet voice and with a very sweet smile.

‘But you have what goes with a warm temper.’

‘Yes? What is it? Hating?’

‘No; a warm and kind heart—that is what I mean.’

‘I said you only knew me a little. But you do look solemn! What are your thinks now?’

‘Coffee and strawberries, mademoiselle.’

‘Coffee and strawberries?’

‘Surely. I am thinking of a lady I once

knew who was angry, very angry, about a cup of coffee, and then——'

‘I was angry about the coffee because it was poison——’

‘But the strawberries, mademoiselle. It is on account of the strawberries that I want you to do a real kindness——’

‘To you?’

‘No. You are kind enough to me when you sit there in the sunshine. It is to a friend of mine.’

‘Certainly, to a friend of yours,’ said Clari, indifferently. ‘Who is he?’

‘It is a girl,’ said Walter. ‘You can help her—and only you can. I’ll tell you all about her, and—well, it is a sad story.’

‘That is nothing so strange,’ said Clari, with a sudden stiff coldness in her voice—almost of contempt; another new note, which almost startled Walter by its abruptness. ‘Well?’

‘She is the daughter of the organist of Deepweald. She was a fellow-student of mine at Lindenheim. She had a lovely voice, and promised great things.’

‘A very lovely voice?’ asked Clari, languidly.

'Very,' said Walter, emphatically. 'One of the most beautiful I ever heard.'

'Was she a great friend of yours ?'

'We were very great friends ; but I have lost sight of her for some years—I met her again at Deepweald.'

'Since you have been painting me ?'

'Since I have been here. And she——'

'I know. She has the very loveliest voice, she is beautiful, she is charming, she is divine. I know—I know.'

Walter had been painting, inattentively, while he was speaking. He stopped short, however, and looked at Clari. What in the world had he said to offend the prima donna ? Offended she was, that was certain. She was not frowning, as was usual with her when out of temper ; but there was a kind of cloud over her face. Surely she was too indisputably great in her calling to be jealous because she heard a voice praised that was not her own ? And yet the tone of her words certainly suggested jealousy.

'I never said so, mademoiselle.'

'If she is so divine,' said Clari, 'she will help herself, monsieur. What should I do ?

I have enough to care for myself, I, per Bacco ! This is the world, monsieur. If she was only like me, she would want help, but divine creatures do not want for help while there are men.'

' Mademoiselle ! She is no more to be compared to you than a bud to a blossom——'

' It is the blossoms that fade, monsieur.'

' I was saying,' said Walter, ' that she is the daughter of the organist at Deepweald. And he is grown so deaf that he cannot follow his profession ; he will have to lose his place, and that means ruin. They have no means of living.'

' You have learned a great deal in Deepweald.'

' The girl ought to make a name—not like yours, of course, but enough to live by.'

' Let her sing, then.'

' Her father is an eccentric man—half mad, I should say. He refuses her every chance. He will let her do nothing. There is nobody to help her—literally, nobody. With a fortune in her voice, she is like to starve.'

' They say in my country, Heaven helps those who help themselves. One need not

have the voice if one has the face, monsieur.’

‘But Heaven needs agents, mademoiselle. I thought perhaps when you heard the story you might do something. You might hear her—and a word from you——’

‘What could I do? You can do more than I—if you have such interest in this girl. She is nothing to me. And if she were——’

Clari was indeed more than displeased. It was almost as if the whole sweetness had gone out of her when the talk of the young man, hitherto devoted to her own glory, even to the point of declaring Love to be the only painter fit to hold a brush in her honour, had barrenly turned off into the likeness of a trap to catch her sympathy for a—friend. Had he not been so full of his duty to Celia, and of his eagerness to invest the influence of a woman like Clari in her behalf, he might have remembered that his intercourse with the prima donna had been sliding, all these weeks past, with sure slowness, from comradeship to intimacy, from intimacy to confidence, till sentiment had grown warm, and promised

to grow warmer. And in such cases he might surely have known that a woman like Clari, whose summer already has lost its June, is not willing to be asked for sympathy with May.

‘And if she were,’ she went on, after a pause, with a touch of bitter sharpness added to the coldness of her tone, ‘I would not help her. I would not help any girl I cared for to be like me. Can she sew?’

‘She could never be like you.’

‘No—per Bacco! That is not likely. I am Clari.’

Surely such jealousy was something abnormal. And yet what else could her feeling be? Walter felt himself ready to renounce his belief in his comprehension of womankind once for all.

‘I shall send her some pounds, and welcome; they shall buy her a sewing-machine. But I will not hear her—no. I have heard voices enough; I want no more. Tell her to sew; tell her from me, Clari, when you see her to-morrow. Is she as difficult to paint as I? Must you kill her to know her, like me? Very well. You shall kill her: it will

be better for her. I will make no artists—no : per Bacco !'

‘How have I made you angry ?

‘I am not angry. I enrage,’ said Clari, as if leaping at an excuse for relieving herself by speaking hotly. ‘It is this art that enrages me.’

‘I wish I knew——’

‘Oh, you shall know. I have been a girl too—and I know. There was one came to me and talked of art—like you to her. I was not happy—and you talk of being poor ! I was poor—poor as she does not know. Art ! Ah, that was a divine dream—all things : and love besides. I sold myself for it all—I have told you before. He was a demon. He made me sing, and sing, and sing ; have I not told you all ? I remember it—like yesterday ! It was the Carnival. You have been in Rome—you have seen it all. I was a child ; I knew nothing. I had lived in a prison ; such a prison ! And then, all at once, all in one moment, I found myself alive. The moccoli went out ; it seemed as if I died again. Then he came, and told me I should live for ever if I followed him ; that

he would give me all I had seen, and make me a queen. He bound me to him, that I might not escape from him. He kept me his slave ; I must serve, he said, that I might rule. I made myself a slave, for I knew I was to be a queen, and live, and have all the world. At last, he said, I have made you ; you can sing. Ah, I knew that, as well as he ! And then—then I learned what I had been bought for—Art, *gran Dio !* Art—to wait till I could give him glory ; to serve him like a slave till my youth was gone, and my voice was worn ; to see other women becoming queens, and living my life—mine ? That was not what I followed him for, *gran Dio !* Yes, I loved him. He made me. But he did not keep his bargain ; he cheated me, with lies. What would you have done ?

It would be idle to say that Walter Gordon fairly comprehended one word of this outburst, which seemed to assume itself to be an intelligible story, though every detail was omitted, and though she leaped from point to point without a pause for questioning. Only one thing was clear to him thus far—the great *prima donna* had been gloriously trained, and

was splendidly ungrateful. Though for what reason he could not conceive ; unless it was that her first music-master and impresario had tried to cheat her—not so extraordinary an experience as to call forth such lifelong indignation.

‘I should have done like you,’ he said ; ‘done myself and my master justice.’

‘Ecco !’ she said triumphantly. ‘That I have done ! I told him to his face—you have made me, and I am made. I would not wait—I had not changed the Ghetto for art—I sang. Ah, I loved to sing—then. He could not hinder me. We were in Florence then. I sang the first time there. Gran cielo, the furore that first time ! The people went mad, monsieur ! It was Lucia. It was triumph for me. Ah, he had taught me well—and I was to waste all that, all my soul and my glory for art—bah ! It is a thing—I know not ; I knew what I knew.’

‘You have not told me who he was—but surely he must have been proud of you.’

‘He was a demon. What he wanted—how could I tell ? I left the theatre ; I went home. When I went to the theatre he had

not said one word. He knew I was going to sing ; he only said, " Go, then." Ah, do you know what a devil can do, when he is a man ?

Walter felt himself on the very brink of some strange discovery, though even then he was unable to comprehend the preface. Still, the fierce volubility of the prima donna, once set fully free, carried him away ; her incoherent story infected him with something of its passion. He waited silently, that he might not by a gesture even divert its flow. He at least knew her well enough to know that the merest straw might turn the current in mid-course.

' He can rob a mother of her life—her child. That is what he can do. That is his revenge. That is art. And I hate art—that is why. Sing for art—gran Dio—I ! I sing for revenge. I sing for glory. I sing for diamonds and flowers. That is my revenge—if he is anywhere in the world. Ah, art will have not much chance while I am alive. I sing because I hate art, and because I hate him. Paint me now—quick ! Have you your dagger ? Now, while the

hate is out on me. You know me now—
eccomi quà !

Incoherent, incomprehensible, her passion was real. There was no doubt but that there stood before him the true Clari, beautiful, natural, and fascinating for—men who can love tiger-women. Walter Gordon would have given a year of his life to be able to paint her just as she was then. Any shadow of anything beyond sentiment for her that had been growing up in him died away into pure artistic admiration, intensified by the effect of her dramatic power. For even in the very truth of her passion was the tragic force of the born actress, which not even an outburst of nature could distort or lessen. It was art and nature in one. But she had not told her story. Was it literal truth, or only a bold metaphor made at random that some real man, in revenge for her having escaped from his managerial tyranny, had robbed her of a real child ? That would indeed be satanic, because inhumanly incomprehensible.

And, whatever it all means, what could have produced this sudden outburst of confidence ? Surely not his mere proposal that

she should try the voice of a poor girl, with a view to putting her in the way of picking up a few professional windfalls. Could it really be that she, the great artist, really hated the very name of her art so intensely as to look with horror on the idea of a fellow-woman's treading the same road ? And then he thought of The Five Adzes, and could not convince himself that Clari's devotion to her calling was the result of such unadulterated hatred as she professed it to be. Her love of admiration was at least as genuine as the passion that had just been displayed before him. He could only wonder and reflect, as many a better and wiser man has done before him, what riddles some women are. Even Celia was beyond him, with the devotion to her capricious tyrant which seemed more outrageously complete than Clari's rebellion had been. If he could only persuade Celia to follow that far in the footsteps of the prima donna !

‘Let us go,’ said Clari, ‘and look at the cucumbers.’

That was the first thing she had said to-day that did not surprise him. He was pre-

pared now for any variation of mood ; had she really presented to him a dagger and her heart he would not have been surprised. But he noticed that she spoke sadly.

'And when,' she asked, as they entered the garden, 'are you going to Deepweald ?' This more gently.

'I don't know. It all depends. Do you mean you are thinking of——'

'Hearing that girl ? No. I've said so. But you can give her a note for me. That may help her—and her deaf father. Is she very beautiful ?'

Walter was growing a little wiser, if only for friendship's sake ; or, at least, a little more prudent. 'She is pretty enough,' he said, thinking of the gentle dark eyes, aus Lindenheim, that had never looked but kindly and sweetly, for all that they were so like Clari's—sometimes.

They had not quite reached the cucumber-frames, when Walter was aware of a tall clerical figure approaching them from the direction of the park. It raised its hat as it approached, and :

'May I speak to you for five minutes ?'

said the Rev. Reginald Gaveston to Mademoiselle Clari, before he nodded to Walter Gordon. ‘I was told I should most likely find you here.’

Walter Gordon wondered, as well he might, what business the curate of St. Anselm’s could possibly have with Mademoiselle Clari—of all men and of all women in the world.

CHAPTER V.

A DUEL.

‘SPEAK to me?’ said Clari. ‘Ah, I remember you now. You are the ecclesiastic of the little sick girl. I hope she is well?’

‘Bessy is quite well, thank you. In fact, there was never any cause for anxiety—but Bessy, my wife, was alarmed; we only have one, and mothers will be mothers, you know.’

‘Yes. A mother does not like to lose her only child. But it is not all fathers who feel that, monsieur. I am glad your little one is well. You wish to speak to me?’

‘If you don’t mind. But first I have to thank you for your most munificent gift to——’

‘Bah! It is a bagatelle. Mr. Gordon and I were looking at milord’s cucumbers. Do you love cucumbers, monsieur? Cucumber salad is good—but with some little onions, it is divine.’

And her beautiful eyes lighted up with so much enthusiasm, that Walter Gordon thought her in the needful mood for killing and painting.

‘I know that gratitude is an insult to charity,’ said the curate, feeling that he had said a good thing, and making a mental note of it for a future occasion. ‘But, nevertheless, a poor parish must be excused for being grateful, and so must I. And I will show it in the way you seem to prefer—by asking another favour.’

Clari shrugged her shoulders.

‘Tre mendicanti fanno un frate—Three beggars make one priest,’ Walter heard her murmur. ‘I am not rich, monsieur.’

‘Oh, it is not that, indeed. Could I speak to you indoors? It is a matter of charity in a way, but not of alms.’

‘Ah, that is another matter. But see—I put out both my hands, before I hear. If it

is to sing—no. I am amusing myself here at Hinchford.'

‘To sing?’ said the curate, looking a little bewildered at such an idea on the part of his noble cousin. He knew she was an amateur of the first water, but did not know the favourite ambition of amateurs which shows itself in assuming that they are more professional than the profession. ‘Who would think of such a thing?’

‘People think, because I sing a little, I have only to be asked; that is all, monsieur. And you would have to get leave of Prosper. But if it is not to sing, that is the better. We will walk to the house. Well, monsieur?’

‘You don’t know March, the organist of the cathedral?’

‘I have not the honour, monsieur.’

‘Of course you know him by name. Well, it’s a sad case. He’s gone stone deaf——’

‘Ah, I know. Come on to the house; I shall send her some bank-notes, to buy her a sewing-machine. I will not hear her, monsieur! Corpo di Bacco. No!’

‘You know the case, then?’

‘I know? Yes; I know. I know to-day from—— And what I said then, I say now. I will not hear. She shall have a sewing-machine.’

‘Will you pardon me? The father is about to lose his situation. The daughter has been educated for the musical profession, and has the very best of characters. She has great ability, I believe. I thought, if you would, you could recommend her——’

‘I have said it. No. I am not like every woman, I. “No” is “no” with me.’

‘But, may I ask why?’

‘Certainly. It is because I please. That is my reason for all things; it is enough, and it saves time; ask Prosper, he knows.’

‘I thought——’

‘But, tell me, is she so beautiful, this girl?’

‘She is nice-looking—very nice-looking, indeed; but a little peculiar—rather foreign style. She has been so long abroad.’

‘She knows Monsieur Gordon. No?’

‘I believe so.’

‘She must be charming, this girl, to make all the men care for her. A girl who can do

that wants no help from me. She is born under a good star. Make her my compliments, monsieur.'

' You will not see her, then ? I'm sorry for that. I made so sure you would take an interest in musical people.'

' I detest musical people. They are humbugs, what you call—all of them. I am one myself, I know.'

' I made so sure that I brought her here to introduce her to you. But I suppose it's no use now ?'

' She is here ?'

' I left her in the drawing-room when I came out to look for you. I was told you were about the grounds. It would be a real charity—but of course, if you——'

' I will see her. I should like to see a girl who can make all the men care for her.'

' Who deserves all men's care,' said the curate, gravely. He was beginning to think less and less of Cousin Alicia, and to doubt the value of an introduction to her on the part of a young and innocent girl.

' Who gets it ?' said Clari, sharply.

Assuredly both Walter Gordon and Re-

ginald Gaveston were sad blunderers. There was excuse enough for the latter, but the former at least should have known—had he really known anything of Clari—that every sign of interest taken in a rising star, however obscure as yet, was gall to the woman whose youth was passing, and to the prima donna whose sun was passing its noon. Walter Gordon had been her slave at Hinchford—and what woman likes to fancy that she is losing a slave? If it was as true as she had declared in her morning's passion that her life was so unloved and unlovely, if she had been building at least a cottage in the air on the foundation of a young man's sympathy, the existence of a young and beautiful rival was a harsh discovery. Poor Celia! What would she have thought had it been revealed to her that Mademoiselle Clari was jealous of her about Walter Gordon?

She had been left alone by Gaveston in the white drawing-room while he went to find her future patroness, Lady Quorne. Her conscience was at ease in this matter. Destiny had driven her to take her career into her

own hands, if only to save her father from finding the workhouse itself the end of the road to an artist's glory. There was certainly no livelihood open to her in Deepweald, and even she knew enough to know that in London, without aid, she would be but a drop of rain in the ocean.

Naturally all her thoughts turned to the only friend she had ever known, Herr Walter aus Lindenheim. And him and his aid she had forsworn—not because her heart had obeyed, but just, in effect, because it is impossible to reason with a man who is stone-deaf by means of a scrap of music-paper and a pencil. She had not been put to the grand test of obedience by having to meet Herr Walter in the street and to turn her back upon him.

And now, thanks to Mr. Swann, she was about to be enrolled among the protégées of that distinguished amateur, the Countess of Quorne. The result of an introduction was certain. Whatever Lady Quorne's eccentricities might be, however much beer she might popularly be supposed to drink at The Five Adzes in Laxton—and the reputed quantity

was already computed in quarts—all the world, in and out of Deepweald, knew her for a constant and eager friend of art and artists, and ready to help even the most undeserving who came to her with the cachet of an eye for colour or an ear for a song. And one word from her was enough to open a career, whether for a teacher or concert singer. It was better to make a *début* at Quorne House in Park Lane than at a public festival. Celia was nervous when she entered the lodge-gates of Hinchford, but not afraid. The pupil of John March, the star of Lindenheim, knew that she could sing, and she was not going to let her father starve because she was shy.

But it seemed to her that her guide and friend, the curate of St. Anselm's, was a long time gone, and waiting tries the nerves. She made the tour of the sunshiny pictures that hung round the walls, looked at the view of the deer-park from the window, and wondered at the magnificence, the like of which she had never seen. Surely the Queen could not have finer furniture than Lady Quorne, who amused herself by playing skittles at public-houses.

At last, however, she heard the sound of

voices coming towards the door—one was the curate's, the other a lady's, clear and bright, with a foreign tone in it, but not such as to remind her of the Lindenheim Babel. The door opened, and she saw—Lady Quorne ? No—

Mademoiselle Clari.

Never, since that eventful afternoon of the concert, had she forgotten her lodestar. Years had passed since then—she was years older—but the divine Clari was still the divine Clari ; not a day older since she stood smiling royally on the stage in the Shire Hall, looking to Celia like the very incarnation of song. Yes, there was Mademoiselle Clari, in the flesh, off the boards—she and no other ; the one woman on earth whose very name her father hated, and for hearing whom she had been expelled and exiled to Lindenheim. What fate had brought her into the very presence of this glorious demon ? How could she write when she went home, ' Father, I have seen Mademoiselle Clari ' ?

Her heart beat fast—strangely, unreasonably fast, it seemed to her. She had heard many voices at Lindenheim, but none like

Clari's ; many ways of singing, but none like hers. And yet she knew her for the arch-enemy of art—had not her father said so ?

As she blushed and trembled before the great prima donna, she suddenly felt the eyes of Mademoiselle Clari turn full upon her with a long penetrating gaze that gave her actual pain.

‘ This is Miss March,’ said Gaveston.

‘ Yes,’ said Clari, opening her fan, and not holding out her hand.

‘ I wish you would hear her sing.’

‘ I am told you wish to go on the stage ?’ said Clari, sharply.

‘ No—not on the stage,’ said Celia, feeling as on the first day at Lindenheim, only without a Herr Walter to come chivalrously to the aid of a shy girl.

‘ To be a singer, then ? You would look well on the stage, though. Can you sing ?’

‘ I have learned, madame.’

‘ That is something—not many people learn. Where have you studied ? In Naples—in Milan ?’

‘ At Lindenheim.’

—‘ Ah, among the German pigs. Yes, I re-

member. It is a bad school. If you wish to sing you must go to the land of song, mademoiselle. I am not going to hear you, so you need not be afraid of me. I have told Monsieur Gordon, I have told your friend here, I tell you—I will help nobody. And since you learned among those pigs, that decides me. They are artists there. Why do you want to sing, mademoiselle ? It is great folly of you.'

‘ My father—I want to help him, if I can.’

‘ Well, it is something not to say for art, mademoiselle. If you say for diamonds, I believe ; if you say art, I do not believe. I sing for diamonds—I.’

The curate of St. Anselm’s stared at Cousin Alicia. Celia looked with bewilderment at Mademoiselle Clari. Was this the Countess of Quorne ? Could this be the Queen of Song ?

‘ But you say to help your father. That is a bad reason, mademoiselle ; that will not make you sing. There are only three ways ; you must love diamonds, or you must love somebody, or you must hate somebody. Then, if you have got a voice you will sing.

But, by teaching? No. That is why you must learn in Italy. They love and they hate there. Have you ever loved, mademoiselle?

Celia reddened. There was just enough consciousness about her to keep her from the full blush of those to whom love is merely a name.

‘No? Then you must begin. I sing for—diamonds. But, no; you would not love diamonds, and you could not hate if you tried. So you must love somebody, mademoiselle. No; not your father. Have you a mother?’

‘No, madame.’

‘She is dead? Very well. Yes; she is pretty,’ said Clari, audibly, to Gaveston. Then she played a little with her fan, gravely. ‘Do not blush, my good girl; you will have to hear that often, if you go on the stage. You will hear more than that, if you have ears. You can turn a head—with eyes. You are not like the English girls. Mademoiselle—I think—I would like to hear you sing. But, first, you shall hear me.’

Celia knew that her duty bade her turn suddenly ill—anything that might serve as a

pretext for leaving the room. If it had been a sin against art to hear the great prima donna in a concert-room, this was worse a hundred times. But what was she to do? And she was conscious of a fascination that would have kept her there, had she been able to do anything.

‘Prosper accompanies me,’ said Clari, ‘but he is not here. So I will sing without him. It is right you should hear what you will have to do.’

‘Miss March can accompany you,’ said Gaveston. Celia looked at him in desperate protest—but was it not part of the hopes of her friends that she would be able to make herself useful to Lady Quorne? And here was an unexpected chance of displaying her accomplishments not to be thrown away.

But Clari opened the grand piano herself and sat down to it, without accepting the offer. And then, without prelude or preparation, she dashed at once into a song in dance measure that Celia did not know—some Tuscan or Neapolitan song, full of laughter and tune, such as can never be approached by any composer with a known name.

Whatever he may be in poetry, in music the great Anon stands first, without a rival. A scholar can make harmony, a solitary genius may create melody ; but it takes a whole people to turn a heart into a song.

Why did Clari sing there and then ? She sang as if she were bent on crushing the heart out of the girl at once, by showing her what none but herself could ever hope to do. Diamonds must be inspiration, thought Celia, if this is what they mean. She felt herself carried away—not by the song, but by the singer. It was the Shire Hall all over again. And there seemed something especially sympathetic to herself in this clear, strong soprano, with a rich softness and depth in it that does not belong to the soprano by ordinary right of nature. The words were nothing—some boatman's conceit about the eyes of his mistress, the flower-girl, being like stars, or something equally original. But Clari found passion in it, and made others find it too. After all, there is nothing in music, poetry, or painting that goes beyond what means just simply, 'I love you,' in any language under heaven ; all song comes to

that, and where that is, a Clari may find scope for what she will. ‘I love you,’ sang the boatman to the flower-girl; and the giants whom Celia had worshipped at Lindenheim could say no more. And there are two ways even of saying, ‘Your eyes are like stars.’ Clari sang as if the boatman felt the star-beams waltzing through his heart and veins.

‘Bravo!’ said the curate of St. Anselm’s.
‘Thank you very much indeed.’

Clari turned to Celia, and saw her eyes filled with tears. Celia had never been so moved since that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon in the Shire Hall.

The prima donna rose from the piano with a calm smile. ‘And now, mademoiselle, I should like to hear you sing.’

‘Oh no, madame. I did not come to sing to you,’ said Celia. She had come to satisfy a countess; not to compete with Clari. Was it true she must love or hate before she could sing with her soul?

‘No? Do not be afraid. I want to hear. If you can cry yourself, you can make others cry. I only want you to see. That was not

singing—that was only some little tricks. You could not make art do that, *Corpo di Bacco* !

Celia was not looking at Gaveston, or she would have seen bewilderment even greater than her own creeping down even to the point of his longest whisker. She was thinking of her father and—well, it was true that Clari had not sung in the strict sense of John March, or even according to the classic traditions of Lindenheim. It was just a heart-burst ; and yet she knew, by some instinct, that Clari had no more felt her own passion than she felt Celia's wonder. It was glorious ; but she felt the pain that some illusions give when they fade away.

‘ If I can make people laugh and cry, what shall I want with art to make them sleep ? ’ said Clari, scornfully. ‘ Art is humbug, my good girl. It is what the people make that do not know the ways ; when one has no voice and bad eyes, then she is artist—gran Dio ! When a man is stupid, then they call him wise. I have learned that long ago—you shall learn it now. You have good eyes, mademoiselle. If you have the voice, and

can make them love you and give you diamonds—then sing ; if you are an artist, then—sew. Let me hear if you have the voice, mademoiselle.'

Celia wished that the floor of the white drawing-room would yawn open and engulf her. She to sing after Clari—to exhibit her pure style to the contempt of a genius who had so cynically avowed herself a charlatan ? She felt she could die sooner. But she did not yet know Mademoiselle Clari. Even as she had fascinated the gamekeeper at The Five Adzes, so she now charmed Celia by her will-compelling eyes.

John March's daughter moved to the piano as a bird moves to a cobra, while Clari smiled encouragement in a way that did not encourage. But, as she struck a first timid chord, pride came to her. She was there to represent Lindenheim and the old masters before the enemy. Humble as she was, she was not so humble as David compared with Goliath ; and, in any case, she was there, no longer to show herself off, but to assert a cause.

The second chord was bolder. She hurriedly

ran over her répertoire in her mind : and, by way of asserting her cause, chose a stiff, formal song by an old Italian master—one of those she knew by heart long before she had ever heard of Mademoiselle Clari. It was graceful, but as quaintly formal and old-fashioned as the *Minuet de la Cour*. Her voice was not to be compared to Clari's, but it was sweet and pure, and, strange to say, with some of those richer notes that distinguished Clari from all other soprani.

At first, the great *prima donna* smiled indifferently. Then a little scornfully. Then the smile left her face ; then her eyebrows drew together, and her fan stopped waving. Gaveston watched her, and saw in her growing attention a favourable sign. Celia must be making a good impression on Cousin Alicia, after all.

But presently the frown deepened ; her cheeks began to turn pale, and her lips to tighten. She sat as rigid as a statue. Had Walter Gordon been there, he would have added a new mood to his collection of her expressions. By-and-by, the fan began to flutter fiercely and quickly again.

Celia knew she was singing well, and her voice, which at first had trembled a little with excitement, grew in power. She somehow felt engaged in a duel, in which she was fighting for the right, though the wrong might win. No passion was to be drawn from her song—only the purest grace, and the delicate aroma, so to speak, of pot-pourri. Clari's song was a heart-burst ; this, a subtle dream, with a thread of gossamer running through—nothing, unless sung. And Celia sang.

She did not rise from the piano, nor turn round, when the last note was held till it died.

‘Bravo !’ said the curate.

But in a moment she felt a clutch upon her shoulder.

‘You have not learned at Lindenheim !’ burst out the prima donna. ‘Whoever says that, he lies. Ah, you have learned of Andrew Gordon !’

Celia's shoulder was bruised by the tightness of the grasp ; her ears vibrated with the sudden fierceness of the words.

“Yes—of Andrew Gordon ! I know—Dio lo sa ! That is he—every note. You have

his very changes, that he made for—yes, Andrew Gordon, or Satan, mademoiselle. *Gran Dio!* Has that demon found two women in the world ?

‘ *Giulia*,’ said a stout and handsome lady, still on the right side of middle age, who just then entered the room, ‘ what mysterious concert is this going on ? Why did you send me no invitation—especially as we have a *débutante*—and a very charming one, it seems,’ she said, glancing at Celia, and pausing politely for an introduction. ‘ Why, Reginald, are you here, too ? Is—is this—*Mrs. Gaveston* ?’

‘ What—Cousin *Alicia* !’ stammered the curate.

‘ What is the matter ?’ asked the lady, observing, but not noticing, the thunder on the face of the *prima donna*. ‘ Of course, I’m your Cousin *Alicia*. I was so sorry you couldn’t stay to dinner the other day. Won’t you introduce me to *Mrs. Gaveston* ?’

‘ This isn’t *Mrs. Gaveston*,’ blundered the curate. ‘ This is *Miss March*—I wanted you to hear her sing.’

‘ And you’ve done better, if you have got

Mademoiselle Clari to hear her. And now I'm here, she can't do better than sing again—if you will favour me, Miss March, that is to say. Are you any relation to Mr. March, of Deepweald? One of the finest musicians in England,' she said, turning to Clari. 'You'd better stay to lunch, Reginald, and be introduced to Lord Quorne; and you too, Miss March. I'm jealous, Giulia—you never let me hear you sing.'

Celia was wrapped in bewilderment, the curate in confusion, Clari in absent thought. Lady Quorne thought that Hinchford must have suddenly ceased to be her own, and have become possessed by the winds; for she might as well have spoken to the winds as to her three visitors.

CHAPTER VI.

CLARI EATS.

LUNCH at Hinchford was announced by a gong. And when, to-day, the thunder that proclaimed so important an event rolled through the white drawing-room, it seemed to act like the breaking of a spell under which four persons had been bound. The first to obey the disenchantment was, naturally, Lady Quorne ; the last was Mademoiselle Clari. But the last was the first to speak.

‘I am glad to hear the gong,’ she said, ‘I am hungry.’

‘Then let us all go down together,’ said Lady Quorne. ‘You will let me hear you sing presently, Miss March—won’t you ? It is a long time since we met, Reginald—you

and I ; not since you used to come in your holidays to Derehurst. I must make your wife's acquaintance one of these days.' She was speaking as they went downstairs. ' Ah, here is Lord Quorne ; this is my cousin Reginald—the clergyman at Deepweald, you know. Miss March, let me introduce you to Lord Quorne.'

Celia let herself be introduced formally ; but she was not regarding with all the awe due to him the distinguished amateur of cucumbers. Her heart was beating painfully. Not only had she felt the actual grasp of Clari upon her arm—a sin that, however unintentional, was almost beyond the reach of confession at home—but she found herself in the presence of him towards whom she had vowed silence ; Walter Gordon himself was talking to the earl.

' Fräulein Celia !' said Walter. ' Miss March and I are old friends—fellow-students,' he explained to the countess. He looked at Clari inquiringly.

' Mademoiselle and I have sung at each other,' said the prima donna, with less expression in her voice than usual ; for there

was dramatic intention, often inappropriate enough, in the way she said the most commonplace things. But there was no indifference, but the intensest earnestness in every tone, when she added, 'And it has hungered me.'

'To hear her again?' smiled Lady Quorne. 'There, Miss March—there is a compliment for you.'

'No, to eat,' said Clari.

Walter ought to have known the prima donna by heart, by this time. And he was beginning to suspect her of wearing her soul less openly upon her face than he had once believed. He had at least once seen the tigress loose in her; and the sight had been a piece of insight for him. A man seldom observes a woman so closely as circumstance had brought him to observe Mademoiselle Clari. And now there was no sign of any of the expressions that he would have expected to see. She did not look ill-tempered, as a jealous woman might who had found a rival. She did not look good-humoured, as a woman of tact would, in like case, have taken care to appear, nor yet indifferent, nor yet patronis-

ingly kind. He could not help watching her as she ate and drank, no less observantly than while she was breakfasting at The Five Adzes. She was something of a gourmande, as all real artists are, and to-day her appetite showed that she had not spoken of being hungry without good reason. But there was a something about even the way in which she eat and drank to-day as if even that process was typical. Why not? Intense people express themselves in the way that is nearest to hand, even if it be no more than in cutting the wing of a fowl. A man eats in one way when he is going to sleep after his meal; in another when he is going to fight a battle, though there may be but the barest distinction visible to uninterested lookers-on. And somehow Walter fancied that the wing of that particular fowl was representing other food for the knife of the prima donna. She eat as if she meant it—but what it meant was not easy to say.

When we read of a woman, fired with passion, rushing to the piano and finding a safety-valve for her over-wrought feelings by dashing into a maddening whirl of song,

the outlet seems natural. But the outlet is equally natural when the piano is represented by anything else that comes nearer to hand. There are very clever women who find it in sweeping down the homes of innocent spiders, or in scrubbing floors ; they do not feel the less vehemently because they cannot afford to keep a grand piano. And, though there is a shame-faced theory to the contrary, spiritual excitement and bodily hunger are constant companions when the lungs are as sound as Clari's. She might have her moods and her passions, but she threw on them, beyond all question—as Walter Gordon could not help thinking.

He was sitting opposite to both the women whom he had been led to think of together, and compared them. He had been growing very observant lately : Clari had more than merely touched his imagination with her infinitely varying moods and caprices that ended in smoke, her tragic thunders in calm air, and her bursts of passion that ended in—luncheon. Imagination, when once roused, must lead somewhere—it is the highway to the heart, as everybody knows ; but it does

not follow that she who opens the road gate reaches the goal. She may point the way for some companion who could never have opened the gate, but may make far sweeter flowers spring along the road. How was it that at Lindenheim he had found out that Celia March was interesting, piquante in her shy way, amusing to talk to because she listened, modest, sweet-tempered, all that a girl should be--except beautiful ? How was it that now her beauty of face struck him as if he had been absolutely blind at Lindenheim ? Of course she had grown, and at her time of life the years give beauty instead of taking it away, but even still her chief beauty, as always, lay in her eyes ; and if they were beautiful now, they must have been beautiful then : for eyes do not change after childhood. They seemed to him even more beautiful than Clari's. They wanted both flame and heat, but they were sweeter and calmer ; to spend one's life watching Clari's eyes, thought Walter, would be like reading some new book that keeps the mind in a state of perpetual curiosity and excitement from page to page ; Celia's, like reading

one that one knows by heart and is not weary of for the second or third time of reading.

Observation is certainly a fine quality for a painter, who has only to do with things as they seem. It is worse than Will-o'-the-Wisp to men who wish to know things as they are.

Giulia Clari lunched like a gourmande, as she was. Noëmi Baruc thought and thought like a gourmande, too, who sees a fair table spread before her, and with revenge written for the *pièce de résistance* in the menu.

I have sought to keep no secrets—this is not a story with a mystery. I cannot help it if any one has forgotten the name of Noëmi Baruc, and wonders who was this unnoticed guest at Hinchford. It does not follow that, because people assume it, prime donne are born full fledged—are fruits that have never blossomed. It is true they do not often grow on conventional trees. Sometimes they are picked from wayside hedges, in the shape of beggar-girls who wander about from country fair to country fair. Another may

be a stage-struck contessa or marchesa. Another is born in the purple—that is to say, on the stage. Another is picked up ripe from a southern market-place ; another from some obscure Ghetto. Such had been the destiny of Noëmi Baruc, the pupil of Andrew Gordon.

The girl from the Ghetto, with the earrings dangling before her in the air, shut her eyes, that she might see them better in the dark, and followed them blindly. She let Il Purgatorio, her master, and La Purgatoria, her mistress, drift away like waves that pass one who journeys up the stream, forgetting that she wore on her back a mantilla that, to say the least of it, was not her own. The Carnival had cut her off from her old life in the Ghetto as sharply as if it had been death itself. She simply could not go back. The will of the enchanter was upon her, who had promised her all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them for a song. And then, if she went back, she knew very well that if she escaped an actual beating she would be doomed to bread-and-water for some days to come. She was not fond

of a bread-and-water diet, even in those days.

In short, the stranger with the strange name said 'Come,' and she went with him.

How it was that the police authorities had nothing to say to the departure from Rome of a stolen mantilla of Spanish lace with a girl inside it, he best knew—unless, indeed, Il Purgatorio the money-lender had his own reasons for not putting justice en rapport with his mantilla. At any rate, before night was over she had left the black shadow of the Colosseum, where for the first time she had opened her lips in song. Before noon Rome itself was out of sight, and the next day saw her in a strange city. Such sudden changes absolutely dislocate lives. In two short days she was Noëmi Baruc as little as if she had never borne the name and had never heard the tongue of La Purgatoria.

And she was not only in a strange city. She was in Paradise. To consider the nature of her relation to the young man who had so summarily carried her there never for a moment occurred to her. He was the enchanter who was to give her heart's desire : she, the

slave of the ring—that is to say, of the earrings, and of all that they typified. In some unknown way she was to sing herself into the heart of the world. Meanwhile, for the cheap price of studies which to her were mere child's play, she had purchased all pleasant sights and sounds, freedom from household slavery, food and drink of the best, a soft bed, and all such common comforts as to her were undreamed-of luxuries. A little study for a few hours a day was a cheap price indeed to pay ; to exchange her lace mantilla for a barbarous bonnet and mantle after the fashion of Paris was well worth twice the labour, in her estimation of things.

She missed nothing ; for she had never had anything to miss except such things as gave the piquancy of contrast to present luxury ; just as a man whose work compels him to get up earlier than he likes misses his week-day necessity on Sunday morning. She had a lodging to herself—a room in a palace. Her master had another to himself ; but she had more company than ever in her life before, for he visited her at regular hours twice every day. And he was with her, in a sense, even

when he was not with her ; the mesmeric force that had compelled her to follow him formed a sort of atmosphere in which her life developed itself.

But, so far, she did not feel her life a slavery. It was all too new ; and compared with the service of *Il Purgatorio*, the service of Andrew Gordon was absolute freedom. He set himself to educate her, not only in song. In most things he did not succeed very well. His pupil was very far from clever, and was a little old for learning. Had not his patience been infinite, the alphabet itself would have been to her for ever a mystery. Books were not ear-rings even ; and there was not one word about herself in any of them. But when it came to song !

Infinite impatience could not have kept pace with her. It seemed as if her throat had been sealed up all her life, and that now the seal was broken—as if song had been gathering in her for years, in order to overflow and burst out as soon as space had been made by the merest prick of a needle. It must have seemed part of the magic, had it not seemed so natural to her to sing. It was

her one talent ; but it made up by its excess for the lack of every other. She was not one for whom rules are made ; she out-raced system, and left law behind her. She sang to herself, or to her audience of one, as if every note were to buy her a diamond of water in proportion to beauty of tone.

And so for some time, unmeasured by her, the days went on in such delightful contrast to those of the Ghetto that she was unaware of their barren monotony. But she was not the only inhabitant of the palace which the marchese, its owner, let in lodgings, contenting himself with three or four rooms on the second floor.

One day—for the first time—she received a visitor. He was a man of imposing appearance so far as stature, high shoulders, embon-point, and a profusion of jewellery could make him ; whose features recalled memories to her mind that were connected with foul smells and the other characteristics of once upon a time. His eyes were bright and dewy, and his features rather eastern than southern in their contour.

‘ Signorina,’ he began and continued in fluent but vile Italian, ‘ I am Prosper.’

‘Prosper?’

‘Yes, I. Only last night I arrived from Moscow.’

‘From Moscow?’

‘Mademoiselle has never sung? No. But walls have ears, mademoiselle—the ears of Prosper. Frankly, I want singers; you want an impresario. I am not a man of words. I come, I hear, I engage. Me voici, vous voilà, —voilà tout.’

Noëmi felt her heart beat. The wizard had fulfilled his promise; the glory was at hand. She had never heard either of Prosper or of Moscow, but if she was to have the whole world at her feet, there was no need to trouble herself about biography or geography in detail.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I have never sung.’

‘No, or I should have heard you; and no, or I should not have engaged you. When I want singers I do not go to the old; I discover the new. That is my principle. It is a grand *début* I offer you, mademoiselle—a grand *début*, for which many would come to me on their knees. You shall have good parts; one whole season; more if you suc-

ceed. And you will: I do not engage failures, mademoiselle. I will give you five hundred francs; and when I say I pay, I pay.'

‘Five hundred francs?’

‘Yes, five hundred, mademoiselle.’

‘And for the season?’

‘For the season.’

Have I said that Noëmi Baruc was bred and born in the Roman Ghetto, and in the house of Il Purgatorio? It requires no literary talent to be aware that a single diamond worth having is not to be bought for five-and-twenty pounds.

‘Yes, I will sing. And you will give me five thousand francs——’

‘For one season?’

‘Every week, signor.’

Andrew Gordon’s pupil was decidedly improving. Prosper raised his hands and cast up his eyes.

‘Five thousand francs—a week! Who ever heard of such a thing? Why Saffi herself gets no more in London!’

The girl’s eyes shone. ‘Then I will go to London.’

‘Do you know what you say? Why, any girl in her senses would pay me—pay herself to have a *début* that I give you and pay you for! Think, mademoiselle.’

‘I think,’ said Noëmi. ‘I think I will sing for five thousand francs every week.’

‘If you can get them—no doubt! Perhaps you will find some one to give it you. But if you do—it will not be Prosper. No. I will go farther before I engage, mademoiselle.’ But he did not make any sign of going. Noëmi did not answer a word, but simply looked as stubborn as a mule. For a moment, a sort of duel of looks passed between the two.

But Noëmi must not be credited with more business talent than was due to her. What she really thought was, ‘If I cannot sing for all I want, I will not sing at all.’ And she merely said five thousand a week because Prosper had said five hundred the season. She had made a long shot; but was beginning to find it tell.

‘Well,’ said Prosper, ‘I do not bargain—I engage. Say one thousand for the season. It is double what I ought to give; but never mind.’

‘Five thousand,’ said Noëmi.

‘Are you a mad woman?’

‘If it is mad to say five thousand francs a week—yes, signor.’

Prosper groaned with what might have been amazement, or despair, or both combined. But his groan brought him no inch nearer the door. Another duel of eyes passed between them — something like the game of moro, where fingers are counted and a game seems to be won or lost by clairvoyance, rather than by commonplace seeing. We dull Northerns and Westerns do not understand such things. We have to say ‘checkmate’ before we know whether white or black has won. But cleverer races bargain for sport ; not because they do not know by instinct, from the third or fourth move of the opening, which is going to win.

‘She is worth six thousand francs a week. She knows it, and knows that I think so. And if I don’t give her five, somebody else will give her six ; and I shall lose a prize. Take five thousand a week, and I shall have made a good bargain ; and you know that too, and thank you for not asking six’—so

said the silence of Prosper, while his hands and eyes went up still higher in the needful semblance of horror and despair.

‘I did not know I could get so much, but I see now. He would give me anything I asked—checkmate!’—said the silence of Noëmi.

‘One thousand a week. There!’ said Prosper. No bargain must be made without bargaining. ‘Two thousand. Say three. Well, then, I don’t mind ruin for just once, four.’ He paused.

The Ghetto blood understood the pause by instinct. Custom demanded some concession on her part, or there would have been no bargain.

‘Four thousand five hundred,’ said Noëmi carelessly.

Prosper stopped despairing. So long as she took off a centime, honour was satisfied.

But so exciting had been a process of which no Englishman may hope to understand fully either the delicate points of etiquette or the charm, that neither had been aware of a third party to the duel, who stood by with pale face and sternly angry brows.

‘The signorina is engaged to me,’ said her master coldly.

‘Pardon, monsieur,’ said Prosper, politely; that is to say, as politely as a man can who fears he has bargained in vain. ‘I have the word of mademoiselle. May I ask the honour of an introduction, monsieur? I am Prosper.’

‘The signorina will not sing for a paltry five thousand francs a week—no, nor ten,’ said Andrew Gordon, firmly. He did not observe how Noëmi’s eyes shone. She believed implicitly in the magic of her master. Was it the purse of Fortunatus itself and all Golconda that she was to sing for? ‘She will sing for art—if you ever heard of such a thing.’

‘Monsieur le père ou monsieur le mari?’ asked Prosper, falling into his native language out of the villainous Italian he had been speaking to Noëmi. ‘Mister the father or mister the husband? Monsieur is English, I perceive.’

Andrew Gordon considered for one moment, no more. He must seize upon some claim to bind her to him in such wise that no im-

presario in all Europe might so much as tempt her from him, and from the service to which he had devoted her.

‘Her husband,’ he answered. ‘Good-morning, monsieur.’

CHAPTER VII.

NOËMI'S LOVER.

IN the new city to which she had been carried by her master, life still went on in its former grooves. At least nearly so, for the days can never quite repeat themselves. Outwardly they were the same ; but Noëmi felt herself fired with an altogether new enthusiasm.

What an utterly glorious thing Art must be, if it was worth more than five thousand francs a night for a whole season !

She had sold her life to some purpose indeed. She studied song and finance hand in hand, and her wits quickened. She had already shown considerable aptitude for at least one of them—finance—in her interview with Prosper ; and, though a girl who had never

possessed so much as ten lire in her life, had been more than able to hold her own. To her master she showed the other ; no wonder that he feared being robbed of such a gold mine.

Such she felt herself ; she herself was the Cortez of her own Mexico. The dream of her life felt less like a dream, now that it had obtained a value that could be stated in francs and weeks. She began to understand why a man should have picked up a stray girl on the Roman Corso, carry her off from her own people, hide her like a secret treasure, and devote his whole life to her culture. Of course he was right to keep off such trespassers as Prosper, and she made up her mind to ask at least ten thousand francs on the next occasion. Meanwhile, she sang and studied with all her might, as if aiming at twenty thousand. She was stupid enough in hundreds of ways, and more than ignorant enough in thousands ; but she had one piece of absolute wisdom, and that the very rarest in all the world—she knew what she wanted. And she knew how to get it—at least she thought so.

Had she been brought up like any other young woman, rich or poor, in any other country, her life must have been utterly unendurable ; as hard and as empty as Celia's, before exile to life and Lindenheim. Noëmi had not even the weekly companionship of a Deepweald Dorcas meeting. But she was not yet satiated with the common comforts of life—luxuries they were, after her manner of life in the Ghetto. It was enough to have enough, without wanting more ; and she had aims and ambitions enough to keep her from lonesomeness. She had never known the love of man, woman, child, dog, or cat, nor dreamed of such a thing ; so she could no more miss it than any soulless creature can feel the want of a soul. That people did fall in love she knew ; though not so well as if she had been brought up in the Corso instead of the Ghetto, where love affairs were carried on with oriental arrangement rather than with Roman freedom. There was a great deal of love in her songs, but she drew but little of that learning out of them—*Io t'amo*, their eternal burden, meant ten thousand francs a week ; perhaps twenty thousand.

What would she do with them when she got them ? That she never thought about ; people would rest content enough with what they have, if they ever asked themselves why they wanted more. Sufficient unto the day is the good thereof—or might be, if we made it so, even when it rains. At any rate, to-day's rain is better than to-morrow's sun.

If she could have performed the double feat of reading herself and then translating herself into words—of which she was incapable as a philosopher—she would have answered, ‘ I want to buy the whole Carnival ; joy to make up for misery, freedom for slavery, wealth for poverty, luxury for starvation, laziness for labour, everything for nothing, but joy above all ; to hold in my very hands the whole vision that came to me on the Corso—diamonds, horses, flowers, fine clothes, homage, but above all, diamonds ; to bathe my soul in them and enjoy them all.’ It was real genius in its way ; it is not every one, man or woman, who is born with such a sublime appetite for joy, so ingrained and so intense as to be proof against a girlhood spent in ignorance of its very name, among

sights, sounds, and scents that exclude a whisper of it from her, until at last it had come to her in one blaze of glory, and fired up with lightning all the sleeping soul that had been born in her. Without genius for joy, the soul that had only slept in her must have died years ago at the hands of La Purgatoria.

This eager soul of hers was inspiring and making possible for her the stiffest passage in an especially stiff exercise, when her master, sitting at the piano, stopped suddenly.

‘What have I done wrong?’ she asked. Much experience of his ways had established a sort of sympathy between them—so much so, that an entire lesson was often carried on without half-a-dozen words.

‘Nothing.’ And then she saw, for the first time, that the whole attention of her master was not concentrated upon the lesson.

There were reasons, and to spare, why it should wander. It was a very hot day, and the city was all asleep under a blue sky, while these two were toiling on for to-morrow’s sake, and letting the present gold and blue float by like a worthless dream. A

dim scent of summer, without more definite perfume, found its way through the green persiennes into the artificial twilight of the half-empty room, in the middle of which stood the piano on a polished floor. More than once, Noëmi has been spoken of as under a sense of enchantment. It was not that she was imaginative, but on hot noons and under starlight summer nights, south of the Alps or Pyrenees, nobody needs enchantment to feel at times under a spell. Just now it was the spell of half-sleep. When the piano ceased suddenly, the melody was taken up by the splash of a fountain in the courtyard, which played dream music to perfection.

The master, as he sat with his finger-tips poised motionless on the keys, looked like a man in a dream, and his drowsy look was infectious. Noëmi, always inclined to bodily laziness, and a splendid sleeper, leaned her elbows on the piano and let her eyes close languidly. Neither of the two looked at the other ; but the presence of beauty must needs have its contagion as well as that of sleep, and the master must have been stone-blind

or without a pulse if he had failed to notice that the girl, to whom of late he had been devoting all his days, had been growing very beautiful. When there was nobody to see her out of a looking-glass but the rats and spiders in the loft of bric-à-brac, she had promised to turn beautiful ; and she was keeping her promise faithfully. Plenty to eat, plenty of sleep, plenty of good air were doing their work well.

The contrast between them, if only on this score, was glaring ; and by no means so redeemingly picturesque as under the stars of the Corso. The full-bodied, robust womanhood of Noëmi, coming upon her girlhood with the suddenness of countries that have no twilight, was a lamentable foil for the quaint, hard ugliness of the Englishman, who neither in stature nor in face had a single point in his favour. She was to him more than Venus to Vulcan, and as a grown woman to a dwarf, into the bargain. And, worst of all, in spite of his exceptional plainness, there was a fatal air of commonplace-ness about him altogether—at least till one began to feel the strength that belongs in

herently to absolute singleness and simplicity.

Of course he had fallen in love with his pupil. At any rate she did not know it; and, ignorant as she may be about all things, love and all, she could hardly have failed to find it out if her voice had given him one human thrill apart from its accidental music, or her fingers had set fire to one fibre in him when he happened to touch them. Probably flame knows when it burns.

‘Noëmi, I am going to marry you,’ said he. ‘And now, go on.’

But Noëmi did not go on. She only took her elbows from the piano, stood up, and from her height stared down at the top of the head of her master, where, young as he was, the hairs were already thinner than they should have been.

‘Well?’ he said impatiently.

‘You said——’

‘I said, go on.’

‘No, but you are going to marry me. And La Purgatoria married Il Purgatorio,’ she said, in a grave tone that meant volumes.

‘I must marry you,’ said her master.

‘There’s no help for it. I saw Prosper in the town to-day. Luckily he didn’t see me, so I wasted no time.’

He was not speaking in the least like a lover; indeed, so far as his deep voice was capable of inflection, it implied a rather unpleasant but absolute necessity. To any other than Noëmi it would have sounded like, ‘I must have this tooth out, whatever the pain may be.’

Some instinct came to her and told her that this was not even how Il Purgatorio, in far-forgotten days, had asked a woman to be La Purgatoria. Indeed she knew, beyond instinct or guesswork, that Manasse, the young old-clothes’ merchant in the next street to theirs, had, as a fact, asked old Giacobbe’s Rebecca in a strikingly different way, for all that business arrangements were as satisfactory as could be devised. There is a flavour of romance about even a kiss in the Ghetto.

‘Why must you marry me?’ asked Noëmi, doubtfully.

‘Because I must keep you.’

‘From Prosper?’

‘From the whole swarm of Prosperc.’

‘ You mean they would give me too little money ?’

‘ Too little ? They would give you too little if they gave you all the gold in the world. And, yes, they might tempt even you,’ he said gloomily.

‘ Not if they gave me too little,’ said Noëmi, with decision.

Her master struck an angry chord. ‘ The place shall be sacred from the name of money where I am,’ he said loftily. ‘ You sing for Art, Noëmi ; understand that once for all. That is why I brought you from the Corso. And I mean to keep you for Art ; I have a right to you. And the only way I can see is to marry you.’

There was a long mirror between the windows with their green persiennes. Before Noëmi had seen the world, it will be remembered, she had seen herself, and had played fantastic tricks before a looking-glass for her own solitary benefit, and as a relief from cracking nuts in purgatory. Her eyes turned to the mirror now ; there was light enough in the darkened room for her to see herself by. And it would not have been ignorance of the

world merely, but downright idiotcy, if she had not been inspired by what she saw there with the question, 'Is that why you asked me to come with you?' There was a soft note in her voice, softer than when she sang, as if the woman's love of love, which men in their vanity so often mistake for love of them, had just begun to whisper, 'I am here.'

'That—what?' asked her master. 'To keep you? You don't suppose I meant to train you for Prosper? You are everything that I wanted, Noëmi. You are more than I ever dreamed of finding. There was destiny in my finding you, and in your having been kept apart from me. You have a voice such as one does not find once in a thousand years. You are a splendid instrument, that can be tuned as well and as truly as if you had been made of wood and wire.'

She looked at herself in the mirror again, and did not feel that 'wood and wire' was the most accurate description that could possibly be given of her, or that, if it had been, such a composition would have been a reason for wanting to marry her. But every one to his taste; and it was barely possible to ima-

gine that common flesh and blood would have had their commonplace attraction for this grim young man. During all their intercourse, with her voice in his ears daily and her womanhood growing constantly before his eyes, he had never so much as touched her with the tips of his fingers except by accident, and then, as it seemed, merely as if she had been the piano-case, which one must touch now and then if one uses the keys often. But yet—but yet, she felt after all a man does not ask a fiddle to marry him in order to keep it ready to hand.

‘You have only two faults,’ he went on. ‘One will cure itself. You think too much about money.’

‘Do I?’

‘But the other—unluckily, you are very beautiful.’

Was it only the ghost of a dream, or was there really the dim suspicion of life in his voice when he called her beautiful? The first word of intelligible praise she had ever heard in her whole life made her own heart beat, though there was nothing in his tone to tell a bystander that he was not speaking still of a

piano-case instead of a girl. So perhaps, after all, the little thrill that ran along her strings was spontaneous, and not caused by sympathy.

‘Prosper and his like judge music by the eye. They hear with their eyes, just as some women sing with theirs. For myself I should prefer you to be as ugly as sin, so that the triumph might be only Art’s when the time comes. But I must take you as you are. Yes, you are very beautiful; and it just doubles the danger of loving you, I mean. There are other people who will want to get hold of you besides Prosper.’

‘Yes?’ After all, this was more interesting than a music lesson.

His fingers kept running vaguely over the keys as he went on. ‘There are people like Prosper who will talk to you of money. But there are others who will talk to you about other things, and want to buy, not your voice, but you.’

‘Because I am beautiful?’

‘Because you are beautiful.’

‘I think,’ said Noëmi, almost as if she were really thinking, ‘I think I should like to be bought because I am beautiful.’

‘What?’ said her master, bringing his vague runs to an end with a heavy and abrupt discord.

‘Yes,’ she said, without starting. ‘I should like to be rich because I am beautiful. And just not because I am like wood and wire.’

‘I must marry you—that’s all, then. So now—go on.’

‘Why?’ she asked, leaning on the piano again, and looking at him with the whole fulness of her eyes.

‘Why? What do you mean? Because we have been wasting time?’

‘I mean—I don’t mean now. I mean, ever. What am I going on for? And how long am I to go on?’

‘Haven’t I told you ten thousand times?’

‘Please tell me again.’

‘Ten thousand and one times? Very well. For the sake of Art.’

‘Does Art make people so very rich?’ she asked in a voice that bore no more taint of avarice than a nightingale’s.

‘Rich?’ he said, with a scorn that passed unnoticed over her head; for it was not

aimed at her, but at the legions of enemies, with whom his air was always so crowded as to be an incessant battle-field of one against the world. ‘Ask the people who live by it, and hear what they will say. Why do people follow it but to grow rich? Why do people take to any trade? If you want to be rich, you are in the road. And if men and women grow rich by the sham——why, when they have the real again, they will drown you in gold,’ he brought out with two full chords on the piano. But his sarcastic logic missed fire; her mind was as literal as the multiplication table, and she thought she would like to be drowned in that way. ‘Yes,’ she thought besides, ‘no wonder he wants to keep me! And if I am beautiful too?’ And the man himself had charmed away half his own ugliness by giving her beauty its first word of praise.

No wonder, if he was able to read her at all, that he felt by instinct how absolutely needful it was to bind her to the cause by the strongest possible chain. For Art’s sake the man would have married her, had it been needful in that case, if she had indeed been

as ugly as sin. But even he could not fail to know that any day, any hour almost, might bring the death-blow to his usurpation of her life and soul. Italy was not the country where beauty is allowed to live unclaimed, or where women are left to die in ignorance of what love means. Any minute, even, he might see his labour lost, and his instrument of final triumph wrenched from his hands. Worse still, he might lose it after years more of labour, on the very eve of victory. Was there no note of human love in all this ? He was conscious of none ; but, as to the whole question, it may be that he would, after all, have tried the experiment of not marrying her had she indeed been as ugly as sin. Motives are queer cobwebs, and hard to untwine.

She was still thinking. Love has as many tricks as it has shapes, and, when absent, thinks nothing of deputing its power to pity or to praise. In this case, it was to praise. To hear herself called beautiful was so far like first love that it gave her a new sense of conscious life ; since she had heard the words, she had grown twice as beautiful.

But one need not follow too subtly the visions of a girl whose path lay so plainly before her. The master enchanter, whoever he was, had already given her an earnest of his power by transforming her from a usurer's house-servant in the Roman Ghetto to a beautiful woman, for whom strangers were already contending as to who should give her five thousand francs for a season, while she knew herself, on the authority of magic, to be worth perhaps a hundred times more. She had been asked to marry, not a man, but an incarnate diamond mine. Some woman's instinct may have sighed to her that there was another life somewhere; but it was a very faint sigh—too faint to hear even its own whisper. There are women, who never heard of the Ghetto, whose thoughts would scorn her for even such a ghost of a sigh.

‘Go on’ said her master once more. And on she went—through something more than a song. Every note was a diamond. If Prosper had once more been lodging in the next room, he must inevitably have burst in with an offer of his five thousand francs twice told. And she would have refused.

But what would she have said had she seen her master, lover, magician, after he left her, how he sat down at his desk, and said to himself :

‘I can take my full time now. In ten years she will be in her prime—and then ! Yes—it was the only thing to do,’ said Noëmi’s lover, as he set to work upon the skeleton of his score, in which he forgot even Noëmi, and saw only, in a vision of far-off glory, that triumph of Art over all meaner things for which he had sacrificed name, wealth, and fame, and would think nothing of sacrificing his whole self; and what, in the name of the cause, mattered a beggar-girl from the Ghetto ? If the car must roll over her, let it roll.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOËMI'S SECOND OFFER.

It may sometimes take half a lifetime to eat a mouthful of cold fowl. The length of the operation depends entirely on what is in one's mind at the time.

Walter Gordon had, of course, heard of the caliph, who, in the moment's space between dipping his head under water and bringing it out again, lived through not half a lifetime, but the whole of it, from the cradle to the grave ; in short, through the entire circle of existence that is epitomised under three short heads in the first column of the supplement of *The Times*. He thought that Clari was eating in remarkable silence, even for her in one of her rare silent moods ; no doubt she was hungry, but the use of the teeth did not, with

her, hinder the use of the tongue. If he had thought of the story of the caliph, he would have found the key. But how could he, even then, in the interval between the cutting of a morsel of fowl, and its entering her lips, have read the story of Noëmi Baruc, as it acted itself in the air before her? Words take time to read, as well as to write—vivid memories outrace lightning, and know nothing of time or order.

Even while she saw herself munching nuts, and making postures before the mirror in the loft of bric-à-brac, she was also standing in a corner of the Corso among the thick of the Carnival crowd; and the horses ran, and the moccooli gleamed like glowworms in the dark, and the flowers and the sugar-plums rained, and the diamonds flashed in the broad sun, all at once together. At the same instant of time, she was singing for a pair of visionary earrings in the shadow of the Colosseum under the moon—she was bargaining with Prosper for francs, and with her master for the purse of Fortunatus and the empire of the world. And, not after all this, but together with it, she was—nursing a child.

It is to be feared that her master, when he married her out of hand, by way of artistic necessity, and to keep off the impresario-fies, did not take into account certain other accidents of marriage. But such accidents will happen—especially when they are least wanted. Intent upon giving the world the end of a great work, the means he had taken to insure it had as yet only given it the beginning of another woman. Merely the beginning of one as yet—a baby in the guise of a chrysalis, with a very little face and prodigiously large brown eyes. It was, as a matter of course, swathed round as tightly and stiffly with linen bands as grown-up children are with circumstance; and its great brown eyes stared with almost grown-up wonder to find the world about it so very queer. It was a very poor substitute for the great work indeed.

The lessons had to stop, for beyond a certain point nature flatly refuses to submit to the severest system that the greatest philosopher—nay, that the greatest fool—has ever made. And suppose Noëmi was to take it into her head to turn into that most hopelessly in-

artistic of all creatures—a mother? The maestro knew little of such matters from experience, but he knew, theoretically, all about the maternal instinct, and how apt it is to override every other. He had never been able to conquer that unconfessed distrust of Noëmi that had driven him to marry her as the only sure means of binding her safe, in the teeth of temptation. But here was a traitor in the very citadel, whose strength was not to be measured by its present size. From all the perils of the world, the flesh, and Prosper, he had securely caged her; but against a baby—what in the name of art was he to do?

And what, in the name of nature, was Noëmi to do with the baby? She had scarcely ever touched such a thing, since she first touched herself with her own baby-fingers, in immemorial time. No such being had ever found its way in with the sunbeams that used for an hour a day to creep through the barred windows of *Il Purgatorio*, who would most surely have kept against it a debtor's account for board and lodging, at compound interest, from its first birthday, and turned a

penny out of its very mother's milk, somehow. Infants, otherwise than in law, were too wise to visit that special house in the Ghetto. What was Noëmi to do with such a thing?

She could love it.

And, somehow, that came to her more easily than even singing.

But as she sat and nursed her bambina at the end of its seventh week, the look on her face was as little like such a common thing as mothers' love as can well be conceived. For that matter, it was not such a look as a man would like to see in his wife's face, whether she were a mother or no. It was more like the hunger of love, than love of the sort that a woman gives either to a man or to a child. That Noëmi Baruc from the Ghetto had at last found her human soul was clear—but it looked little enough like a soul that was worth the finding.

Now it so happened that Prosper, in his search for a new star, had been disappointed bitterly. More than that, he had discovered that he had been grossly and shamefully taken

in ; and that wounded his amour propre, both as a Frenchman and as an impresario. Never had he been driven to admit such a thing to himself in all his life before. And by a girl, too, who had not even the right to a débûtante's knowledge of business—and by a composer, forsooth, and not even a famous one ; by a man whom an impresario regards as much his proper prey as a sparrowhawk regards a sparrow ! And by an English composer—a nondescript kind of creature hardly to be recognised in the operatic world, while Waterloo was still something more than a forgotten tradition, and men believed in the story of Cambronne and the Old Guard ! Greater than Cambronne, Prosper would neither die nor surrender ; and he was bound to retrieve his dishonour. It had not been hard for him to learn that the English musician was no more married to the beautiful Jewess than she was married to him, Prosper. When the Englishman had declared himself her husband he had distinctly lied——

‘Like an Englishman,’ said Prosper. ‘Perfidie Albion ! The idea of that ape being married to that angel ! But no man shall

say that he has twice made a fool of Prosper ; no, if it costs me six thousand francs a week, no. She would be cheap at seven thousand ; and she only asks for five.'

Prosper knew his business ; and not even amour propre would have had a word to say had he not honestly believed that his newly-discovered star was of the very first magnitude. And, though Il Purgatorio, for reasons of his own, had not set the police on the traces of the stolen mantilla, still they were not quite so blind as Andrew Gordon had assumed. An ugly, dwarfish man cannot travel in company with a beautiful girl wholly unobserved—when it does not occur to him that non-observation is a purchasable commodity. That season at Moscow, and elsewhere, slipped by with no new star ; but Prosper held to his purpose as if he had been a bulldog of British breed, whose teeth are within a hair's-breadth of meeting in somebody's muscle. He set out once more as avant-courier of the next season, crossed the Alps once more, and set himself, like both bulldog and bloodhound, on the trail of his star.

He had run her to earth months before,

and had taken care, at slight expense, to keep himself informed of where she was to be found. And now, even while she was brooding over the seven weeks' old bambina, he was moving along the street in her direction, and thinking of her. If much thought of a person creates sympathy even at a distance, she also ought to be thinking of him—and that was by no means impossible. For the bird in the bush of art still seemed as far away as ever ; diamonds had not yet rained from those sublime skies of which her husband preached, and where he himself seemed to gather nothing but wool. True, the bambina had fallen from them.

At any rate her 'Come in !' in answer to a tap at the door, was replied to by the re-entry of Monsieur Prosper in person. She started rather eagerly at the sight of him, and he started too, for an imperceptible moment, when his eyes fell on the bambina. But there was not even the shade of a moment between the start and a shrug and a smile.

'Am I too vain to hope the signorina remembers me ?'

'I remember you very well,' said Noëmi. Prosper's face glowed. There was some-

thing in her voice, as well as in her face, that he had not found there last season. Even an impresario may recognise a soul in another, though he may have none of his own. It is part of his profession to recognise souls. They have a high market value in proportion to their rarity. He did not see the soul in question, though it was lying in a woman's lap before him plain to see, but heard it in her voice and saw it in her eyes.

‘Ah! And you have not become famous yet? That is strange. But you were right, mademoiselle; you were right to wait for—for—something.’

‘Famous yet?’ repeated Noëmi, with such utter scorn in her voice that Prosper was startled—for more than a moment this time.

‘Signorina?’

‘How should one be famous, or anything else, when one has to wait till one is old?’

‘The signorina will never be old.’

‘I am not signorina. I am signora.’

‘Ah?’

‘And the worse for me! I wish I had taken your one thousand francs, your five hundred—fifty, even.’

‘Fifty ! I offer you fifty ! Never, mademoiselle.’

‘I am not mademoiselle. I am madame.’

‘But why should you wait till you are old ?’

‘Because, *corpo di Bacco* ! I am to sing in a great opera—so great—so great that it will take twenty years to compose.’

‘Twenty years to compose an opera ? Impossible, mademoiselle. Why I, Prosper, could compose one in twenty days. Twenty years—only to compose ! How long will it take to perform, then ? Who is it composes an opera in twenty years ?’

‘My husband.’

‘Ah ! But pardon me ; is it necessary you should wait twenty years for your *début* ? Twenty years is much in a woman’s life, be she ever so charming. She grows fat, or she grows thin. And twenty years of salary——’

‘I do not sing for money—I sing for Art—*corpo d’un Cane* !’

‘For Art ? I do not understand, mademoiselle. You mean you are an amateur ?’

The girl was a Roman Jewess, be it remembered, with diamonds in her heart, and

her heart on her tongue ; reticence is not a southern virtue.

‘ I mean I am to wait twenty years, till I am ugly and old, before I sing some stupid swine-music that will make people put their fingers in their ears. That is Art, signor.’

‘ What horror ! And monsieur—what a man !’

‘ He loves his swine-music ; he does not even love the bambina.’ And she bent her whole self over the child in one moment’s caress, so that it was wonderful the little human chrysalis did not snap in two. ‘ Yes, he went over the world to find some one whom he might break into singing his opera. And he found me.’

‘ You mean he is keeping you for his opera ? And for twenty years ? It ought to be a fine work, mademoiselle, when it comes.’

‘ It is hideous, monsieur—music to make one creep and shudder, like hearing them grind a saw. He brought it to me yesterday. “ Now,” he said, “ let me hear you sing. This is to be your glory and mine.” Ah, if you could only see it, monsieur—just one bar !

But I sang, for I can sing, and I saw the light come into his face as I had never seen it before. And then I said, “The time has come, then?” Think, monsieur, that was what I was waiting for; the stage and the lights and the flowers, and to hear myself singing the hearts out of people’s mouths and the francs out of their purses. “When am I to sing this? And our fortune begins?”

‘And he——’

‘He said, “In twenty years you will be at your best; I shall take care to finish this in just twenty years.” Believe it, monsieur, I am to wait twenty years till I am old, and then he says that the people will hate his work for years, and perhaps not find it out till we are dead and gone—but that it is all for Art. That is what Art means, monsieur. I thought it meant diamonds for the bambina when she is a young girl, and it means—it means—to be the slave of a craze, and to starve.’

‘What infamy?’

‘Indeed, infamy!’

‘Ah, I comprehend—I am not a fool. You are charming. You sing like an angel,’ said

Prosper, enthusiasm mounting his climax like a ladder. ' You would make nine thousand francs a week—ten thousand. You are ambitious ; you have fire ; you have soul, mademoiselle. You throw yourself away on an imbecile—on a—'

' Monsieur, my husband is a great man,' said Noëmi, simply, and with inconsistent pride after all her scorn.

' Mademoiselle, I said it—a great fool. Ah, I know him ! I have known a man in Vienna who went without a meal for one whole day because he would not write what he did not like—as if the art of arts were not the art of living, mademoiselle ! Were we born to starve ? One hundred thousand thunders, no !' Enthusiasm had reached the highest rung.

At least it seemed so. But there was yet one more.

' I will marry you myself, mademoiselle. I, Prosper !'

It was true passion—truer, maybe, than love knows aught of. Every impresario, like every astronomer, glories in finding a new star ; but if he can save her salary, or rather

pay it into his own pocket, then he is in the impresario's heaven, where stars shine as cheaply as the diamonds of astronomy.

Noëmi shrugged her shoulders. 'I am married—to Art,' she said bitterly.

Prosper had as much imagination as an impresario. And therefore he understood Noëmi skin-deep, but that thoroughly. She must be really married, after all—no chain but the very strongest could suffice to chain one in whom he began to suspect the soul of a caged but untamed tigress, hungry for diamonds. And in that case he could not save her salary in the way he proposed. But there are more ways of killing a dog than hanging him—more ways of getting a prima donna for nothing than marrying her. The Italian style is to engage her at a high figure, and then to abscond on the eve of pay-day. But that, in other countries, is esteemed sharp practice, and Prosper was no rogue. It simply occurred to him that, when a woman is married to a man who will not let her sing, it is safe to offer her any terms she asks, and then, when she asks for settlement, to give her any terms one pleases, on the score that a

contract made by a married woman without her husband's authority is null and void. It was only an idea, a scrap of legal knowledge—but it might have its value.

‘Madame,’ he said emphatically, ‘the divinest right of woman is to rebel. What you tell me is an infamy—a horror—a very great pity. Madame, you shall sing this night at the San Gennaro. You shall take the world by storm—by surprise. This night, madame. There is no word like now. I shall hear you—it matters not how you succeed, but you must have sung in Italy, and the journals will say all you need. Then you shall go to Moscow, and you shall have ten thousand francs a week, madame, and all else that you will.’

Noëmi's whole soul came into her eyes—but she said not a word.

For the second time had all her heart's desire come to her in the person of Prosper. A wise man—or woman—may throw away a single chance, but only a fool throws away a second. Every word she had said to Prosper was true. She had followed her master on the road to the glory of the world, and had

found, all in one bitter moment, that its goal was martyrdom.

How was she, the poor, uninstructed girl from the Ghetto, with a soul all one carnival maze of desires—unknown love, untried passion, longing for the fulness of life, eagerness for joy—to sympathise with one iota of the ambition of the man who had no thought of wealth, who despised personal fame, who lived and breathed only for the glory of Art which she had only been able to mistranslate into roses and diamonds? No wonder she felt that she had been trapped on the Corso, to be trained for a victim on the altar of an incomprehensible idol. Not an instinct in her but rebelled against the immolation of life, youth, and beauty for the sake of the craze of a man who was scarce so much to her as the father of the bambina, who monopolised all her love because there was no other creature on earth to claim one fibre of her heart. Had he not lured her on, by false pretences, till there only lay before her a lifelong sacrifice of her whole all-demanding self to a man who had only married her, as she now knew, to make her subjection more complete and her

bondage more sure ? Only that morning she had learned what her doom was to be—a Barmecide feast, with a dessert of Dead Sea apples. All the forenoon she had been brooding over the bambina. And now the gate was opened she had only to pass out and be free. A marvellous great longing came upon her to turn the weapons of Art wherewith her master had armed her, his supreme cultivation of her supreme gift, to her own glory—to disappoint his desire, even as he had disappointed hers. An eye for an eye was still a tradition in the Ghetto. Gratitude ? She owed him none. What gratitude could she owe to a man who had tricked her into wasting herself for twenty years in order at the end to force music only fit for screech-owls into unwilling and unprofitable ears ? She had nothing to thank him for but a fraud.

‘Ten thousand francs a week, and all you will,’ repeated the tempter.

She looked at the bambina. Was she to go without so much as a pair of diamond earrings to her grave ? She panted, she hesitated, she did not make up her mind. One cannot make up what is already made. She

had no need to say 'Yes.' 'Yes' said itself, without words. One day's notice was not much; but Prosper, of all men, knew the need of not letting an iron cool before striking, and plumed himself upon working miracles. He knew the grand secret—promise much and pay little; but let that little be hard cash, paid on the nail. So far as Noëmi was concerned, no miracle was to be performed at all. Such a voice and such an ear, trained by Andrew Gordon, were ready, at three hours' notice, to sing the music of the spheres, let alone the music of any mortal opera, well enough to purchase the praise of all the journals in Italy.

So much for the morning. In the afternoon her master read in the *Gazette* an announcement of the *début* of a new soprano at the Theatre San Gennaro—Mademoiselle Clari.

CHAPTER IX.

NOËMI TRANSFORMED.

WE all know, or can imagine, the sinking of the heart, the cold trembling of the limbs, the deafness and blindness that seize upon that unfortunate creature who is called a *débutante*. Stage-fright is the very acme of panic ; and few are they who have not at least felt its likeness at some wretched moment in their lives. It is not mere ordinary nervousness ; it is not mere absence of such physical courage as a man may force into spasmodic life, when he stands at twelve paces from an enemy pistol to pistol, or even when he wakes some gray morning from a pleasant dream, and remembers that he has an appointment with the hangman. It is

setting one's whole existence, past, present, and future, upon the chance of bringing into sudden sympathy hundreds of hearts which have nothing in common but accidental presence under the same roof; and the chance feels desperate, the hearts are so invisible and the eyes look so much like bricks in a dead wall. One false turn of one's own eyes may be fatal. One must contrive to be deliberately at one's best, to forget one's self consciously, to intensify one's feelings with spurs, and yet keep one's hand firmly on the curb, to do the work of experience without experience, and to leap to results without beginnings—to bring triumph out of despair.

That is stage-fright—and when Noëmi first stepped on the stage of San Gennaro, she no more felt one shade of it, than if she had been the most hardened of chorus-singers.

The girl who had been thrown straight from the Ghetto into the world ought, by every conceivable law, to have felt overwhelmed under the flaring light that beat upon her *début*. The moth, when it escapes from its chrysalis shell, ought to be de-

stroyed in the first moment of life by the sudden transition from darkness to sunshine. But the moth, so far from being destroyed, is not even astonished—nor was Noëmi. The moth would have died in its shell unless released—Noëmi would have withered in the Ghetto. The girl was as absolutely at home in her brand-new atmosphere, as the moth in the untried sunshine. Many are born in rags who never feel their lives because they have no chance of sitting on a throne.

And there was another reason. Thanks to her master, she was already mistress of her art before she set foot on the boards, and her mind had never been confused by hearing other singers. It had never been suggested to her that there was more than one way of singing, and that the right one. She was far too stupid, too ignorant, too much without imagination—except in finance—to keep doubts or nerves, or to question whether there were two ways of which one meant success and another failure. But how about stage conventions, the common forms of acting, and all such arbitrary matters as make talent on a level with ignorance till experi-

ence comes in? She knew none of them, not one; she was too stupid to know, in theory, of their necessity. At every step, she flew in the face of convention, and made the youngest chorus-singer aghast with horror. But this ignorant, stupid, unimaginative girl from the Ghetto had one thing in her that made her instincts right even when they seemed wrong. She had no talent, no experience, no knowledge. But in this one matter of stage-song she had what renders all these and their opposites of no more account than straws. For she had genius. And it was based on the rock of a sublime faith in itself. Genius alone would have been enough, with her voice and her beauty; with her mastery of song, it was more than enough; but, joined with unquestioning ignorance, it was supreme.

Her instant triumph was no miracle. Miracle and genius are only words to define what we do not understand, and impossible miracles, out of story-books, are as common as nights and days.

She was revelling in the first free plunge into her element; she forgot even the bambina at home. But, suddenly, she was aware

of a strange, cold shudder that came over her, and reminded her of what she had felt when, standing on a doorstep in the Corso, the sun had been obscured by the passing of *Il Purgatorio* and *La Purgatoria*. Without turning her eyes to look, she was conscious of the presence among the audience of one unsympathetic pair of ears that kept her song from reaching his soul. By what instinct does one become conscious of such things without any apparent help from sense? And yet that is one of the most common of miracles; one need not be peculiarly sensitive to recognise the near presence of a cat, or whatever creature is most uncongenial to our comfort. Though we are looking another way, we know when eyes rest upon us, and our own turn magnetically.

She knew that her master was bodily in the San Gennaro, an eye and ear witness to her open defiance and rebellion. She knew, or thought she knew, all that was passing in him. Superstition well-nigh paralysed her. His strong, inflexible will had impressed her from the very outset, and had made her feel in his tyranny something of

that force of circumstance against which, under the name of invincible destiny, we know rebellion to be in vain. No doubt the name of Clari had not been able to veil, even in the newspaper announcement, the identity of Noëmi Baruc from his dull but all-penetrating eyes, which had seen a prima donna in a strange girl who had never sung a note ; no doubt he had come to freeze her heart and throat and all the music in them by a spell, that he might keep her the victim of his cruel, dead idol, Art, for ever. For one whole moment she was a nightingale who, in the midst of his song, is aware of a serpent under the bush, and knows that the work of fascination is about to begin.

Can a woman hate a man who overawes and crushes her with a nature outside the comprehension of hers, and holds her under the magic of single purpose and inflexible will ? No ; no woman ever hates her master ; but she can rebel and she can defy him—and the most when she least hates him. I think if Noëmi had failed at that moment she would have become the slave he had tried to make her, and have submitted, with a sort

of pride, to the service of the idol for the rest of her days. For this was a duel à la mort, and the winner must win once for all. Perhaps she half-meant to be beaten, and to find her master strong enough to represent destiny. And for that very reason she strove her hardest to conquer. Take this as a rule—the harder a woman fights, the less she hopes or wishes to win.

But how could a pair of dull gray eyes really affect the matter? They were not a basilisk's—only a man's. And how on earth is one to combine into one comprehensible chord the various notes that make up one complete impulse in any woman? There was another instinct upon her; her master was not merely her master, or her tyrant, or her enchanter, but the one man in hundreds upon whom she felt her song was thrown away. Triumph over thousands is no triumph so long as one is left to defy the conqueror. Clari at The Five Adzes was not content with having conquered dukes and princes till she had subjugated an under-gamekeeper in velveteen. Noëmi, at the San Gennaro, had conquered none so long as she had not con-

quered one—an ambiguous phrase, and therefore especially applicable.

In a word, she sang with all her might to conquer, with a deep, unconscious hope in the depth of her heart that all her might would prove in vain. It would be more than glory to conquer all the world but one man in it ; that was her womanhood. It would be no glory to conquer all the world save one housefly ; that was also her womanhood. And the double, inconsistent impulse gave her fire.

But still she felt the frown of the dull gray eyes. Not one spark of the fire in her seemed to fall on the heart of the magician. She must have met his eyes unwittingly, they conveyed to her such a freezing sense of baffled scorn. Probably they expressed nothing of the kind ; but we always read in faces exactly what we look for in them.

Nevertheless, when the first few moments were over, the mere fact that she was not paralysed, but fired, gave her assurance of victory. Every note she was able to sing under her master's eyes was a broken fetter. At the end of the song she felt—free. She

had fought for victory, but achieved what was better even than victory—freedom.

If he could only have been strong enough to conquer ! But she was not conscious of such a desire. He had not been strong enough, and there was an end. She had become intoxicated with a whirl that surpassed the ecstasy of the Carnival, for this is from her and of her ; lights, flowers, applause and all. She only wanted the diamonds—and they would soon fall in a shower from the pasteboard skies. A singer's *début* is the commonest affair in the world to audiences and *Prosper*s, but it is never common to *débutantes*. And the transformation of Noëmi Baruc into Mademoiselle Clari was not a mere *début*. It was self-assertion, triumphant rebellion, the discovery of her true place, the sweeping away of such cob-webs as *Art*, and musty scores that took twenty years to ripen ; the letting in of full sunlight upon life, glory, francs, diamonds—and all for the bambina, only seven weeks old.

How, or why for the bambina ? Noëmi was the very last who could have told. But

somehow a mother can manage to do all things for her child. The bambina can sanctify selfishness.

And now it was all over, and she had to go home. But the sunlight did not go out with the lamps. How she had gone through the details of the performance no doubt Prosper knew. To her it had been a passion, in which one no more notices details than so many separate waves in the great sea, though the sea is made of them, and would not exist without them. It had not been a picture of everyday life, where equal or proportioned prominence is given alike to faces and furniture, lips and laces, but a mad, misty glory ; a Turner, not a—say, Walter Gordon. The whole evening, in sober fact, had been very much like first performances, when a new singer makes a hit before an Italian audience. It was more than Prosper wanted—a mere appearance would have been enough to concoct Italian puffs for outer barbarians. But we have been seeing with her eyes, and the Roman Carnival itself had become a dark background.

Somehow, she found herself in somebody's

carriage, she knew not where, watching the passing of the light of the carriage-lanterns over the dark corners of the streets. She had not the imagination that makes pictures out of nothing, but she had eyes to see them when they were made, and received impressions from without, as keenly as most people create them from within themselves. If she had a companion, he must have been intensely provoked by the silence of the new star, and have felt that the planet Venus itself was warmer and nearer. As she drew near home—that is, to the bambina, who had not been in her lap for hours, and indeed had been left to take better care of itself than a seven weeks' old baby is generally able to do—she felt her new-found soul softening strangely. The spell had been broken ; the wizard had proved but a mere powerless, mortal man after all, with merely a man's strength, which, after all, is enough for a woman. She was destined that night to anticipate at least half the moods of Walter Gordon's Clari. Something like remorse for ingratitude, now that it was too late, came over her. After all—and she knew it—to-night ; nay, the bambina

herself would never have been but for the grim young man, who had chosen her from all the world because he thought her the best in it, and had set himself to keep her all for himself with a jealousy that was at once the intensest tyranny and the extremest flattery. In spite of her rebellion, he would feel proud of the results of his art. Of that she felt sure. Her triumph was his, though gained against his will. She had justified his belief in her supremacy. He had heard her sing ; and surely all his dry Art-dreams that could satisfy no thirst had been swept away for ever. She felt, or knew rather, that she had found the straight road to every soul ; and, after all, it was souls she had come to conquer, not dull eyes. Yes, he would be proud of her in his heart, though for consistency's sake he might put on an air of extra severity. A new craving for sympathy was growing out of her need of glory. She had no mother to carry her joy to—and joy craves sympathy far more than sorrow, which most people are made strong enough to bear alone, somehow. The bambina was too young. There was only her master. And, yes, as soon as she

saw the least relaxing in his eyes as she came to him with his triumph, she would come back to him and Art and the bambina, and be content with her one full draught of glory and victory and be—a woman. Her conquest had been a greater disappointment to her than she knew; and rather than not be beaten she would surrender her victory.

Is all this inconsistency impossible? Then blackberries are an impossible fruit; and yet the hedges are full of them.

She sighed, hummed the end of an air—it was from the great unwritten opera—and smiled. It was dark in the carriage, so her cavalier, whoever he was, was saved the excursion into the fool's paradise of thinking that either the sigh, or the tune, or the refrain, was for him. Though it was too late at night, she was building a little day-dream. It lasted till it reached home, and after she said good-night to her disappointed cavalier—if he had power over the *Gazette*, so much the worse for her.

She swept up the stairs, still with her victorious yet eagerly tender smile. Noëmi Baruc had been indeed transformed. She

had already pictured the scene that would ensue. Her master would frown sternly, then realise all at once that all this conquest was his, and his very own. She would open her heart, now she had once discovered that she had carried a heart from the Ghetto, as well as a black lace mantilla that did not belong to her. Then the electric spark would fly from the wife to the husband, and from the husband to the wife, and for him it would be possible to exist without Art, and for her to live without diamonds. Now that she had won her point, she understood that there was yet another and a wider world to conquer. She had already known love—by name. Now she saw it in full view, though as yet without a name.

She swept into the room where she looked to find her husband writing, for his visit to the theatre meant lost time to be regained, and she knew that no emotion would ever keep the keys or the pen from his hand. She could not accuse him of being less severe to himself than he was to her.

‘Andrea!’ she burst out, almost before entering, ‘I——’

What was she going to say ? But, in any case, there was no use in speaking to a closed pianoforte in an empty room. It was strange that he should not have returned from the theatre, and her eager impulse fell back upon her with a sense of being baffled. There is but just one right moment for any impulse to go straight to its point. However, it mattered little. And meanwhile, she would go and tell all about it to the bambina. The poor little thing was used to being woken up at all unseasonable hours, to hear its mother's confidences—hitherto by no means complimentary to its father.

It used to sleep in an old-fashioned cradle with rockers. Noëmi hurried to it, and all her full heart went before her.

But—surely the bambina had not gone to the opera ? Surely the bambina—

But, most surely, the bambina was not in its cradle. It was not even in either room. What had happened ? Had wings grown on its shoulders while its mother was away, and had it flown ?

Noëmi clasped her hands in despair, as a horrible guess crept into her heart. Had she

indeed broken the charm, so that, with her first act of rebellion, the demon to whom she had sold her soul, before she had one, was to claim his penalty for a contract broken ? Once before she had been Cinderella, and the fairy godmother had come to her in a Carnival domino. Since then she had heard of La Cenerentola ; and if her costume (procured at three hours' notice by Prosper) had turned to rags on the spot—— But what had she to do with costumes ? Her eyes fell upon a letter, pinned to the cradle.

She could not read much. Her alphabet had been that of notes—musical and financial. But with bitter adaptation to her lack of scholarship, the writer had been at the pains to put the whole of it into capital letters ; and, for the rest, necessity is the mother of scholarship as well as invention. It was the best reading-lesson she had ever had since she first met with her master.

She read :

‘ I will not waste words. You have chosen the wide gate and the broad way, like the rest of them. You are no more of any use to Art ; take your own way, you will have

money enough, and pleasure enough, and you will be happy. My waste will be made up—and it is not all waste to have learned from you what the human voice can do. That knowledge will help my work, and I thank you. But I am not going to leave an innocent child—who may inherit her mother's voice ; who knows ?—to a life such as you will henceforth lead. False to Art, false to Nature, you will not miss her. As for your life, as you have chosen it, I leave you free, you have no husband ; and henceforth your nature will never be troubled by me. As to the child, I only take her because it is my simple duty to save her from being the daughter of her mother.—A. G.'

* * * * *

‘Is it far from here?’ asked Clari, laying down her knife and fork, and taking a large, slow sip of her Chambertin. ‘Can one drive there in one morning?’

‘Far?’ answered Lord Quorne. ‘No. Hinchford isn’t quite so large as that, mademoiselle. Do you mean to say you’ve never seen my frames?’

‘Ah—the cucumbers. Pardon me, milord.

I was thinking I would like to drive to that place—where there is the cathedral, you know. I have not made acquaintance with your lions.'

‘Deepweald?’ asked my lady.

‘Yes—I cannot say your English names. I have sung there, I think—years ago. But I did not see the cathedral. I like to see cathedrals—and, *Corpo di Bacco*, I should like to say my prayers.’

Walter Gordon just lifted his eyebrows. Her moods were past taking him by surprise, and he was beginning to suspect that some of them were not altogether without purpose, though of what nature he could not fathom.

‘It is a Protestant cathedral, *Giulia*,’ said the countess. ‘But I believe there is a Catholic chapel in Deepweald, or *Winbury*.’

‘Catholic? Well, it is all the same to me,’ said the prima donna from the Ghetto, in all sincerity, whose notions of worship were dimly connected with a vision, through a lattice, of a ritual to which mass and service were alike parvenus. ‘*Monsieur Gordon* shall drive me to the cathedral. It is fine, ‘hey say?’

‘ You must ask Miss Celia—Miss March—about that,’ said Walter, anxious to bring his protégée as much into communication as possible with the patroness he hoped to give her. ‘ She lives under its shadow.’

‘ Ah !’ said Clari, turning languidly to Celia. ‘ You shall tell me of your cathedral. It interests me. Let me see—your father is organist there ? No ? And he taught you ? Corpo di Bacco, he taught you well.’

‘ He taught me all I know,’ said Celia, proudly.

‘ Poor Lindenheim !’ said Walter. ‘ Its best student was there three years, and says we taught her nothing. I will drive you to Deepweald with pleasure, mademoiselle.’

But he did not say so quite so eagerly as he would have volunteered three days ago. Clari frowned, ever so little.

‘ Yes—well,’ said Clari, emphatically. ‘ I would like to see your father, mademoiselle. But no. I would only like to hear. He would like to be heard—not like me, who would like to be seen. My friend,’ she said lightly to Walter, as they left the table, ‘ so that is your Miss Celia. She is pretty,

and she sings. But she says not true. Tell me—you know her. She did not learn of her father. She did not learn of Lindenheim. She learned of Signor Andrew Gordon. Ah, I can say that name. Where is he ?

‘ Andrew Gordon ? My uncle ?’ exclaimed Walter. ‘ Then you have heard of Andrew Gordon ?’

‘ Yes—I have heard of him ; that is his style. Your uncle ? Then you know of him ? You know him well ?’

‘ His Comus ? By heart, mademoiselle. But him ? No. He must have died before I could ever have seen him.’

‘ He is dead ? Gran Dio !’

‘ Yes—and the world has lost a great man. To think of your knowing about Comus and my uncle Andrew !’

‘ Why not—if he is so great as you say ? Do you think I know of nothing but Bellini ?’

‘ You are in love with Celia,’ said Clari, suddenly, after a pause.

Walter coloured and smiled. ‘ We are very great friends,’ he said.

‘That for your friends !’ said Clari, puffing away an imaginary feather. ‘I know what it is, for a young man to be the friend of a pretty girl. Are we very good friends—you and I ?’

‘The very best, I hope, mademoiselle.’

‘And we may be ; you are in love, and I am not pretty, nor a girl. I know.’ She began to sigh, but stopped half way.

‘You are beautiful, and you are a woman,’ said Walter, gallantly.

‘I hate compliment ; I hate humbug, said Clari, with a whole frown. ‘I am sick of them. I grow old, I grow ugly. Then goes my voice—and then. But I am rich ; it will be good to be my friend.’

‘I am glad you think Celia March sings well,’ said Walter, not quite relishing the tone of this mood. Could it be possible that the great prima donna was jealous of a child ? For such Celia aus Lindenheim was still to him—a child who needed all the help that a man could give her. ‘I am glad you have heard her. Do you think anything can be done ?’

‘No.’

She spoke with one of her rarest notes of energy. And where was the wonder? It was true that she would not grow younger with the years. It was true that she would have to call in much-despised art to keep her beautiful. It was true that her voice, that men loved to hear, and her face, that they still better loved to see, would lose their music and their gracious lines. And the dying queen looks with no favour upon her in whom she recognises her coming rival, as well armed for conquest as she. Jealousy has few bounds—stage jealousy has none. It was not enough for Apollo to conquer Marsyas without flaying him alive.

And then it was true that when a man and woman are friends, love is not far away. Walter Gordon and Clari were friends, and, with her husband dead, and herself free, might she not have hoped for a little sweetness at last, for the rest of her days? That was a dream, and an unconscious dream. But it did not make her love any better the girl who was born, if justice still lingered on earth, to dethrone her, and who had deprived her of her—friend. For when a frank-faced

man loves ever so little, he must put on an impenetrable mask indeed to keep his secret from observant eyes. It was all very well to play the part of brother to Celia March, but Clari knew the world well enough to know what such brotherhood means. She was not to be taken in by the Platonics of Linden-heim.

Celia had come to look for a friend, and had found a foe.

CHAPTER X.

FROZEN SEED.

AND so the Reverend Reginald Gaveston had renewed acquaintance with his cousin, the countess, after all.

But he was not best pleased with the manner of it. In effect, with the best intentions, he had managed to make a fool of himself, and was obliged to tell himself so, without leaving out epithets or mincing words, while he drove back in the fly with Celia to Deepweald. Now the curate of St. Anselm's had a special objection to feeling like a fool, because he was haunted by the modest consciousness that he was, in truth, not over-wise; his principal trouble had always been that the ladies of Deepweald, at

least, till he married one of them, had persistently overrated him, estimating him against every passive protest on his part, as if an Oxford degree meant necessarily a double first, and a handsome curate a walking dictionary. Nevertheless, when a townful of ladies obstinately insists on calling a man clever, gallantry alone obliges him to accept their opinion, and to act up to his label. And when even a man's wife, who ought to know best, believes that she would live in Lambeth Palace if brains had their due, what can he do but believe? But absolute self-belief is a difficult article in the creed of a naturally modest man, who knows what plucking means, and has never been able to fix his views about the Mahratta War. And now he had mistaken a foreign singing woman for his own cousin Alicia, Countess of Quorne. Worse—he had an uncomfortable knowledge that it was through him that Deepweald had been filled with lying rumours, or rather scandals, of the real great lady; how she drank beer in village alehouses, sang songs to the yokels, and wore somebody else's hair. He had never told such stories himself to a

soul but his wife Bessy ; but there they were, running about to shame him. Nay, he had said—to Bessy—that Alicia, Countess of Quorne, was not a fit and proper person for an honest woman to know. He felt crushed with guilty responsibility, as he sat back in the fly, and forgot the presence of the girl who sat beside him.

He had lived long enough in Deepweald to feel, with its natives proper, that the real world of practical life was exactly commensurate with the cathedral shadow ; that scandal elsewhere was a name, but here, a living power. He had a dim belief that there was an offence known to the law as *scandalum magnatum* ; the phrase was as mysteriously resonant as the no less terrible word ‘simony’ was to the Irish orange-woman, who confessed it to her amazed priest, that she might, at any rate, know its meaning. But, in any case, it was bad enough for him to look forward to the time when the chance presence of Lady Quorne in Deepweald would convict him of being an impostor—of being so little of a walking dictionary, as not even to know the colour of his

own cousin's hair. What would Bessie say ? He almost felt as if he had married her on false pretences.

' Celia,' he asked, ' do you know—did you hear—how long Lord Quorne means to stay at Hinchford ?

Perhaps they might be going away immediately, and then they might not return for a year. In that case, the scandal might die a natural death ; in any case, its author might hope that his original connection with it would be confused and forgotten among the Dorcas meetings, and other exciting events of that lively city.

' No,' said Celia, waking from her own doleful reverie, ' I didn't hear. They all talked about coming to the cathedral next Sunday.'

' The de—— ! ' He checked himself just in time. But had he been guilty of the second syllable, he could have pleaded good, natural cause. If the countess and the singing woman appeared in the cathedral side by side, while the scandal was still raw, what was to become of him ?

But, full as he was of his own troubles,

there was a forlorn note in Celia's 'No' that touched him ; for in his heart he was no fool.

'Come,' he said, 'you have done a good morning's work, any way ; I—I knew it would be a good thing for you to know Lady Quorne. And Clari is one of the first singers of the day ; she sings at the opera and at Exeter Hall. By the way, now I remember,' he said, feeling his forehead grow damp at this crowning proof of stupidity, 'I heard her in Deepweald some years ago. Of course, it is a great thing for her to have heard you ; that was more than I expected. March will be pleased, I should say.'

'Mr. Gaveston,' began Celia, nervously.

'Well ?'

'Pray—please don't tell my father that I have seen—her !'

He looked down at her face and saw tears in her eyes.

'Not tell your father ?'

'That I have seen Clari.'

'But why ?'

'Because I ask you. Please don't let him know that I have met Clari.'

'Of course I won't if you wish it. Ah,

you want to tell him yourself, I suppose. But don't forget to tell him how well she said you sang. We shall be having you another Clari one of these days, and singing in the Shire Hall. Lady Quorne can do what she likes with all the musical people. Of course I mean you'll be another Clari in the right way, you understand. Her ways are not very ladylike, from all I hear ; though my cousin Alicia wouldn't have her at Hinchford, I'm sure, if there were any real harm. Here is your door, Miss March. Or will you come and take tea with Mrs. Gaveston and see little Bessy ? I made my lunch at Hinchford my early dinner, you know, and Mrs. Gaveston will have had hers at one. No ? Then tell your father from me that Lady Quorne is very much pleased with you indeed.'

'Thank you for all your kindness, Mr. Gaveston.'

'Thank you, Miss March, for some charming singing and a pleasant drive.' And so they parted—the curate to find comfort for scandalum magnatum in a cup of tea, Celia to face her father with a double weight on

her mind—that she had both sung to Clari and had spoken to Walter Gordon.

The musician, who had to thank himself for having lost his daughter's confidence, was not, as usual, bent over his desk. He was indulging in the inconceivable sloth of smoking without working ; and either weariness or less intense mental strain than usual had given his features some little relaxation from their chronic harshness, though but very little. Perhaps it might have been some effect of the summer air of evening, always exceptionally sweet and peaceful in that cathedral close ; for the machine must have had a heart somewhere for a mainspring.

‘Celia,’ he said, as she came into the room ; beginning, as always when he had something to say to her, with her name, followed by an emphatic pause. She was familiar enough with the common form, but this evening it seemed to have a new and special solemnity. But then, ever since he had grown deaf, he had thrown increasing weight on every word and every pause, as if determined that not in the least thing would he be conquered by infirmity before he was compelled.

‘Celia,’ he repeated, ‘I am no longer organist at Deepweald Cathedral. The whole matter was brought to an end yesterday. The dean and chapter are of opinion that a musician ought to have ears ; and I take the same view. I don’t exactly know whether I have resigned, or whether I have been dismissed ; they have given me a great many regrets and compliments, and my salary in lieu of notice, and have appointed my successor. Perhaps you know him ; his name is Lucas, and he must have been at Lindenheim with you. I hope he is a little better than most of them, for the sake of the organ. I have a sort of feeling that it will miss me, after twenty years.’

Conversation between Celia and her father had to be one-sided, as she never used her pencil but to answer questions, and otherwise could only answer with her eyes. Perhaps it was this training that made them grow so eloquent, as they were becoming ever since her chance meeting with Walter Gordon. She remembered Lucas ; he had been present at Waaren. Lindenheim was spreading out into the world.

‘And, Celia, as it happens, the salary they have paid me, I reckon, will last exactly till my work is done. I have not been troubled with services or pupils of late, you know.’ He spoke indifferently of what Celia knew only too well. ‘When it is done—but it will take care of itself, then. Yes; the score is very nearly finished now—really finished, with as much mind and strength in it as God gave me; without one note too much, or not as it ought to be. I suppose nothing is perfect; but, at any rate, I have given it my all, and no man can do more. I don’t say it is the greatest work of the future, because the future of Art is all eternity; but it is the first work that contains the whole life of a man. I have never talked of it even to you, Celia. I don’t fancy that Prometheus talked about the man he was making. But very soon my part in it will be done, and then yours will begin. You may not have the finest voice in the whole world, but you can sing; you have been set aside for the work and have been kept pure from all evil. Yes; I see light now; and I shall not refuse the glory, this time, when it comes. I think I have earned my reward.’

Celia had never heard her father make such a speech before. The loss of his situation seemed an accident of life not worth regarding, in the face of the great fact that the work, to which he had sacrificed all life, was at last nearly done. His finding time to rest and talk was like the relaxation of an oarsman's muscles, when the heavy, hopeless-looking sea has at last been pulled through, and only the last surf lies between him and smooth water. Or it was like the lingering over work that has become a second nature, which comes on us like an instinct of warning, that we work after all for work's sake, and not for its end. It is never with unmixed relief or pure pleasure that we write the word *Finis* after anything, though what is ended may be labour or pain. But now, when the end was in sight but not yet attained, the musician was free to rest—say for an hour. As to Celia herself, the end of the score was not a thing to be realised, any more than the end of the world. Of course we know that the world will come to an end—some day. At any rate we say so. But to realise an end one must remember a beginning ; and Celia

remembered no beginning, either of the world or of the score. What she did realise was that if the salary paid her father on dismissal was to last till the end of the score, it must either be the purse of Fortunatus or the widow's cruse.

'Lucas is in no hurry for the house for a week or so,' said her father, still indifferent to the trifles that make up life for others.

'The house!' exclaimed Celia, forgetting her father's deafness. But he had heard her in his own way—with his eyes.

'Of course. This is the residence of the cathedral organist for the time being. Never mind that; Deepweald has served my turn.'

'We—leave—Deepweald?' wrote Celia, hurriedly. It is hard to have to find a pencil and scrap of paper in some out-of-the-way pocket every time one feels an emotion.

'Why—do you suppose the work is to be brought out in the Shire Hall?'

No wonder that the deaf find life harder to bear than the blind. They, alone, are cut off from confidence and sympathy, or, at least, from those best confidences that come as impulses, and the meeting of souls that speak

with the audible voice, though not in any words that can be written down. They have to read all their living books by the sorry makeshift of translation into symbols of voices and signs of words. Unless she were both poet and improvisatrice, what was Celia to do ?

How could she write down for him, when she could not even tell herself, all that leaving Deepweald meant to her ? There was no sound reason why it should mean anything whatever. Deepweald had been nothing but a prison-house for her childhood ; the only life she had ever known had been the three short years she had spent away from it ; her return to it had been the renewal of pain and trouble, doubled by the power to be conscious of them that her short season of life had given her. She ought to have hated Deepweald, and have felt her wings spreading again at the thought of flying away, even though escape might mean tenfold trouble. And yet, who ever quite welcomed change when the change took actual and immediate form ? The most aspiring and rebellious oyster, if there be such a thing in nature, would not

part from its shell without pain ; and there was a great deal of the oyster about Celia March, without the aspiration or the rebellion. She knew that if she could have chosen her own life, it would be to go on living in peace and quiet, under the familiar shadow, listening to the rooks' caw ; and, if she thought of companionship under the name of Walter Gordon —she knew it by no other—that dream was forbidden, and she had been trained to acquiesce easily. She had grown up under the gray cathedral tower till she had grown into it, and her life had put out ivy-roots. The elms in The Close were unlike all other trees and had living souls. The rooks had cawed to her in her cradle. And now she was holding to all this hitherto unrealised reality of her life on sufferance ; in weeks, it might be days, she would have to make a plunge into the cold sea of untried life elsewhere, which is so strangely like having to make the untried plunge out of life altogether. In short, Celia had grown sentimental—perhaps in the air of Lindenheim.

She looked through the open window, and never had she seemed to see The Close and all

it contained as she saw it now. It is a strange kind of revelation, when one first sees consciously what all one's days one has been seeing unconsciously. That is the keenest feeling in deaths and partings. When the sun set, the cathedral tower always blushed over its gray stones. She had seen the blush a thousand times, and yet never till this evening ; and now, all at once, she saw it the thousand times. The returning rooks cawed to her heart through her ears, and her ivy roots felt strained.

‘ Do—we—leave—before—Sunday ?’ she wrote.

‘ No. There is no need to hurry. Well, I suppose it is natural that you should be impatient ; we shall leave as soon as we can. Before Sunday week any way.’

‘ I—want—something—before—we—go.

‘ Well ?

She had never asked her father for anything before. Perhaps, for once, it was easier to write her request than speak it.

‘ Will—you—play—the—organ—the—last—Sunday ?’

‘ I ? When I am dismissed for being too deaf for the people to hear me ?

‘I—don’t—want—you—to—play—to—the—people. I—want—you—to—play—to—me.’

He looked at her suddenly. He had buried sentiment underground ages ago, but any gardener would laugh at the notion of putting a root under the soil out of sight in order not to make it grow.

‘Yes,’ he said sharply, almost fiercely. ‘If you please, I will play once more. They shall see which they like best—a man who hears or a man who knows.’

She looked her thanks, and did not write them. To leave tower, elms, and rooks, without the organ-music that had been the inmost soul of them, would have been too hard. Now she was a great deal more than thankful. She felt that for once some thought in her heart had been understood, and that there was even a chance of active sympathy between herself and her father. Had she not been thinking too much of herself lately? She asked herself as reproachfully as if the question could possibly be decided against her. Her whole heart went out to him—a lonely, deaf musician, with harsh and

repulsive ways, with no life but what he beat, in solitude, out of his brain with hammer-blows, no visible power of loving, and no love save such as she could make for him. Like the tower, she seemed to see him also for the first time.

Somehow, she knew not how so unprecedented an impulse came, her hand found its way into his, and remained there. She almost fancied that it was held. It was the shyest caress on one side, the coldest on the other ; and yet it was more to her than if he had taken her in his arms. She had never felt so unhappy in her whole life before, and never so happy ; not even in those old peaceful times when she knew nothing, felt nothing, and loved no one.

‘Good-evening, Miss March,’ said a well-known voice at the open window, where a passer-by might make a flying call without knocking. It was Mr. Swann, of course ; and he nodded to her father while he spoke to her. ‘I’ve heard all about it ; I’ve just been to Bessy’s, and she told me all about Lady Quorne—my son-in-law’s cousin, you know. That was an uncommon good notion

of mine ; it's some good for one's friends, having one's daughter married to a countess's cousin. So your fortune's as good as made. Your father's pretty well ? He must get the best advice up in London. They may say what they like, but I only hope the new man will turn out half as good as the old one. He must be pretty good, I can tell you, for us Deepweald folk to take to him after your father. March hasn't been sociable, but we're used to him, you see, and proud of him. So I hear we're going to have your new friends at the cathedral next Sunday—my lady, and Madame Clara, and all. The new man'll have to play himself in before all the city.'

'My father will play next Sunday—the last we are here,' said Celia, her cheeks burning.

'Ah ? Then there's another piece of news ! But I'm glad of it—deaf or not, it'll be for the credit of the city. Does he know who will be there ?'

'No,' said Celia, hotly. She had clean forgotten the excursion from Hinchford, when she had made her request ; but it was

not in her to commit sacrilege against newborn sympathy, by keeping even this secret down.

Her father, as if to hide his infirmity, always sat down to his desk, and affected absorption in pressing work before a visitor. He had done so now, and was sitting with his back turned to Celia and Mr. Swann. So far as he was concerned, the secret might keep itself for ever, without helping. But Mr. Swann wrote something on the back of an old letter with his gold pencil-case, and threw it on to the writing-table.

‘Give us something good next Sunday,’ he read. ‘A word to the wise—we’re to have Lady Quorne and Madame Clara. Play out with a flourish—that’s the way.’

The organist turned round towards the window, where Mr. Swann stood nodding and smiling. He gave the message to Celia. ‘What does he mean? Who is Madame Clara?’

‘He means Clari,’ said Celia. ‘She is staying at Hinchford, and——’

‘Celia, you have been at Hinchford!’ The poor bud of sympathy seemed all at once

to shrivel away in frost. ‘Don’t answer me. Good Heaven! Is rebellion born with you? But—it’s no use talking, or hoping, or trying— Yes, but it shall be! When the work is done, follow your——be what you are made, but not one moment before. Good-night, Mr. Swann. Thank you for your news.’

‘Perhaps it’s as well the next time is to be the last,’ thought the auctioneer. ‘It’ll never do to have a deaf organist, who’s cracked into the bargain. Poor girl!’

‘Father,’ said Celia, ‘I’ve been to Hinchford with Mr. Gaveston. I have seen Lady Quorne, and Walter Gordon, and Mademoiselle Clari.’

She spoke the words, without thinking, before she wrote them down. And, though her cheeks grew pale at the terrible confession, she spoke firmly. There was little credit in admitting a half-discovered fault, but she felt brave.

‘Then Lady Quorne, and Walter Gordon, and—and—the rest of them must hear the first of Lucas on Sunday instead of the first

of me. I will not be robbed of my labour a second time. I am too old to throw away five-and-twenty years. We leave Deepweald to-morrow, Celia. Make no difficulties. Bring me my score.'

CHAPTER XI.

SUNDAY MORNING.

SUNDAY morning duly came—the last Sunday for Celia in Deepweald—and, as duly, Mademoiselle Clari astonished the whole household of Hinchford by coming down to breakfast at seven o'clock in the morning. It was true she had made arrangements to do so overnight; but that only made her appearance the more surprising. If she had said, 'I shall not breakfast till twelve,' and had then come down at six, there would have been nothing wonderful. The surprise lay, not in her early rising, but in her early rising when she had planned to rise early.

Nevertheless, breakfast had been got ready for her for form's and hospitality's sake, for

her whims were laws. Lady Quorne had overnight promised to accompany her guest to Deepweald, but had counted so little upon being called upon by the unheard-of endurance of a caprice to fulfil her promise, that her failure to put in so early an appearance scarcely amounted, in the spirit, to a breach of her word. Walter Gordon was ready, however. He rose early by habit, kept his word even when it cost a little trouble, was unconscious of a private wish to go to Deepweald, and was conscious of a suspicion that Clari's plan of going fifteen miles to church was, for once, a whim with a purpose.

So they breakfasted together, and alone. But very seldom had the prima donna been seen at so early an hour—at so late an hour, in another matter, for seven in the morning may be regarded from two points of view, from that of the dissipated nightingale as well as from that of the laborious and business-like sparrow. And, strange to say, and contrary to all theory and precedent, the night-bird had never looked to such advantage as after her very short night's rest, and in a toilette that must have been made in double-quick

time. The theory is that a *prima donna* is never fit to be seen in the morning, and especially by one pair of eyes. Clari, as usual, sent precedent, theory, and experience flying.

Somehow or other her dramatic tact had enabled her to catch and to assimilate the tone and atmosphere of an English Sunday morning ; at any rate to the extent attainable by a fine Parisian lady, who knows how to put on Sunday as if it were a costume. She did not always dress with the best taste in the world, having an almost oriental tendency towards bright colours out of season, when fancy did not confine itself to black velvet and diamonds. But to-day she was faultless. Her costume of black cashmere must have come into existence for the occasion ; her gray felt hat with a drooping feather—or rather bonnet, as hat is called on Sunday—was so constructed as to give her a look of demureness almost nun-like in its sweet serenity. She wore no ornament of any sort but a jet necklace, and looked altogether as if church-going were part of her *métier*. There was no suspicion of making-up, either in complexion or eyes ; and yet none seemed to be

needed. She was pale to-day, but to-day paleness became her.

She was even provided with a prayer-book ; and the effect was just as good as if it had been the English church-service instead of a missal. The curiosity was, thought Walter, how she could have found a missal among her properties—to have found an English prayer-book would have been too impossible.

Fortunately it was a fine morning. Indeed, the weather had been nothing but fine since that now far-off historical downpour at The Five Adzes. Walter and Clari left the lodge-gate in an open carriage, before there were many signs of life about the place except among the birds.

‘I hope it is a long drive,’ said Clari. ‘The air is like drinking champagne. I shall get up at this hour every day till I work again.’

‘You have been taking a long holiday, for you.’

‘Has it seemed so long ? Not long enough to paint my picture.’

‘True ; but then you must remember the number of beginnings.’

‘Well, you must soon end now, if it is to be done. How would it be to take me as I am now? It might be more easy.’

He took a long and critical look at her. ‘It would be a great deal more easy, certainly. The only fault is that the portrait would not be you.’

‘But why not?’ she asked, with a pleased smile, that told that she knew very well why. ‘Do I look so wicked other days?’

‘I mean you look so very good to-day. But do you mean you are so soon leaving Hinchford?’

‘I suppose we shall all wait for the cucumber to grow. But I heard from Prosper yesterday. He thinks of going to America. I have not been there, I think; but it is hard to remember wherever I have been.’

‘What! you don’t remember if you have crossed the Atlantic?’

‘It is possible. But Prosper keeps an account of where we go. I do not see much difference in places—the railway-station, the theatre, the hotel; that is all. I think I would live always at Paris, or else here, at Hinchford.’

‘ I suppose you do find some difference between Paris and Hinchford?’

‘ Well, there is no railway at Hinchford, nor theatre, nor hotel. It is like going to sleep, and I like sleeping. I should like to sleep all my days. But I should dream of Paris ; and perhaps I should walk there in my sleep, like *La Sonnambula*, you know. Yes ; to sleep at Hinchford and to dream about Paris ; I think that would be the most beautiful life in the world. Ah, it is so much best to dream about what one likes than to have it—is it not so ?

‘ Well—no. I can’t agree with you.’ He was wondering just then what was to be the future of a woman like Clari, with no sort of life to fall back upon when her career was ended, as the most brilliant career must be in time. She seemed to have no domestic ties or even interests ; to have stored up no resources for the disposal of age. What became of such women ? That she cared absolutely nothing for her art, at any rate for its own sake, was clear, even if she had not proclaimed it openly. He believed her to be selfish and cold-natured, hungry for admira-

tion, but callous to love ; and when, as she must in time, outgrow the power of extorting admiration, life would have to end before death came. Perhaps she would take to religion for a distraction. And in that case her spiritual director would not have life made easy for him by a woman who, for a whim, had compelled her impresario, the director of her worldly life, to get wet to the skin because she was in an ill humour. Unquestionably, to judge from such speculations, the original fascination of Clari over Walter Gordon was passing away. And yet all the while he knew that if this capricious, uncultured, purposeless woman took it into her head to order him, or any other creature, to leap into a volcano, the leap must as a matter of course be made, not out of love for her or even liking, but simply because she bade. And he felt also that she was as capable of bidding a man, for a whim, to plunge headlong into the heart of Vesuvius as of sending a Frenchman, in an open gig, out into a storm. She would surely be capable of the lesser cruelty, who had actually been guilty of the greater. Walter felt a sense of relief

when he heard that Clari was to be safe across the Atlantic for a time, with her whims that were passions and her passions that were whims. He was never likely to come in her way, but that was all the more reason for her treating him some day as if he were. Of course one never thinks these things, but one knows them ; and one soon learns how to scent danger from afar.

‘ Yes,’ said Clari, as they entered the town, ‘ I thought so. I have been at Deepweald before. I remember that sign over the inn, there—that bell. I remember it because they gave me asparagus with butter, when I asked for it with oil. Would you believe ? They never had heard of asparagus with oil. And it was very hot, I remember, and I could get no ices. You see I know all about Deepweald.’

‘ Then you have seen the cathedral before ?’

‘ No, I think not. I don’t remember singing ; but I must have, or I should not remember the asparagus. It made me cross, I remember.’

‘ You are not cross to-day ?’

‘ No,’ said Clari, sweetly and carelessly. ‘ It is little things make me cross. But the great things——’ She stopped suddenly.

‘ Well, what do the great things make you ? ’

‘ The great things ? Oh, I like them. I think I should like to feel I had killed a man —just one man. But bad coffee—that makes me cross ; and your butter-sauce, your for-ever butter-sauce, that sends me wild, and mad, and vexes me. Is this the cathedral ? No.’

‘ No ; that is St. Anselm’s—Gaveston’s church, you know. This part of the town is called Winbury.’

‘ Ah ! the young priest with the long whiskers and the little girl. He is not very wise, I think ; but he looks a good young man.’

‘ Here is the cathedral.’

The cathedral congregation was not usually large, for Deepweald contained, for its size, an extraordinary number of parish churches ; and, in spite of these, an exaggerated proportion of dissenting chapels. But to-day quite a long train of worshippers was trailing through the south porch, and a large knot of loungers made a lane for them, after the manner of Assize Sunday. But, then, gossip was the

only swift thing in Deepweald, and no Countess of Quorne had come to church in semi-state within the memory of fathers and mothers. Besides, this special countess had never yet set foot in the city.

‘Corpo di Bacco!’ exclaimed the great lady, as Walter helped her from her carriage. ‘Have you ever seen such clothes?’

And, in truth, the ladies of Deepweald must have been wofully disappointed to see the black costume and the gray hat of her whom they had come to take for their model henceforth and for ever. Her face expressed a smile of horror, if horror can smile. There was Mrs. Swann in a brilliant Indian shawl. There was Bessy Gaveston, for once a truant from St. Anselm’s, in a dress trimmed with fur, though the sun was burning. There was Miss Hayward, in all the colours of the rainbow—and more. No doubt they had expected Lady Quorne to appear in the traditional family diamonds—a bird of paradise among the poultry-yard; and behold, every common barn-door fowl was a peacock compared with the pale lady with the black dress, gray hat, and with no colour about her but

her golden hair. However, the disappointment was borne very well, and Deepweald made a mental vow to go into mourning. Clari was solemnly guided by the verger into the best possible stall for being seen, and Walter was placed beside her. Fortunate indeed were they who had good places for seeing. Walter did not know that anything was supposed to be going on out of the common, or he would have wondered what the great east window thought of it all.

The voluntary began ; and Walter, who had his unknown reasons for observing Clari, noticed that, pale as she was, she looked yet paler. It might, no doubt, have been the heat of the crowded church ; but a woman who was used to stage life would not be affected so easily, especially when her lungs had been gathering oxygen all the way from Hinchford to Deepweald. Then he saw a puzzled frown gather over her eyebrows, then a marked, emphatic shrug of the shoulders. And then, for the rest of the service, she absorbed herself in an examination of the east window, through which the sun threw many-coloured shadows on the floor. She

did not even seem to take notice of the dean, or of the mayor in his scarlet gown, or even of the bluecoat boys. Her whole interest in the proceedings of morning service in Deepweald Cathedral seemed to have been blown away by the first notes of the organ.

But to watch a woman who is watching a window, grows monotonous after a time. Walter—who after all had not come to pray—looked round upon the congregation, who had come to pray. One and all were staring hard at the strangers in the two best stalls for being seen in. But he did not see Celia, and he missed her. It was as if the many-coloured sun, and the organ, and the chancel, and the feel of Sunday in the air would have made one perfect chord, had not one note been wanting. And, for once, he was a musician enough to know the note's name. I am not defending Walter Gordon for looking for a girl's brown eyes in church time, any more than I defend the citizens of Deepweald for staring at a woman's gray hat. It is not my mission to apologise for human nature; things are as they are.

In the middle of the sermon Clari yawned,

visibly to scores of pairs of eyes. And then she, too, succumbed to human nature. The church was undeniably hot, and she had risen six hours before her time, and the sermon was dull. ‘Lady Quorne ought to go to St Anselm’s—her own cousin’s,’ thought Bessy Swann, who knew the countess better than most of the congregation, from her husband’s description. ‘She would not sleep there ; and, yes, she does dye her hair. And she does not look good ; but I’m glad she wears black—I can do that myself, and I will. Simplicity is the best taste, after all.’

And so thought at least a dozen others, in unison. Clearly Canon Green’s sermon on ‘Consider the lilies of the field’ was, though dull, not being thrown away.

Clari did not wake till the organ began to play the people out. She sat in her place till the chancel was empty, and then took Walter’s arm.

‘Your Celia told me she was taught to sing by her father, and he is organist here. That is not true—she told me a lie. Yes, Corpo di Bacco—a lie.’

‘Hush !’ said Walter, feeling that the

chancel of the cathedral was not precisely the place for this special phase of Clari's ways of speaking her mind. 'I mean it is so—except what she learned at Lindenheim.'

'But—I am in a bewilderment—Diaminé ! She is taught by a dead man. Ah, as if I do not know his style ! But the dead come to life again, sometimes. You have heard of a vampire ? A vampire is a corpse that goes about among the living, and drains their blood. There are such people ; there was an old man in Rome who had seen one. Ah, and I too have known a vampire ; a man who had no life of his own, and had to find women, and to eat their hearts and drink their souls. Yes—the blood of their lives ! But, che Diavolo !—I came to hear a vampire, and I have heard—an organist. I will go out and take an ice, if you please.'

'What on earth is she at now ?' thought Walter. 'I'm afraid,' he said, 'you will have to be doubly disappointed ; you have not heard a vampire, and ices are not sold at Deepweald on Sunday.'

'No ? Then what for am I here ? But it is destiny. Yes ; your Celia may be the

daughter of a live organist, but she is taught by a dead man. It is horrible—and there are no ices ; will you see for the carriage ? We will go.'

' But you must get some lunch, somewhere, before another fifteen miles' drive. Lady Quorne wrote that we would call at the Deanery—so they will be expecting somebody from Hinchford, I suppose. And then we can drive back towards evening.'

' No. I am not hungry. The only thing I would like is an ice, and if I cannot have that, I will have nothing. Will you see for the carriage ? I will wait here.'

Walter, also, had to lunch on disappointment, for he had missed Celia, and he would, at any rate, have liked to invade the hospitality of the Deanery after an early breakfast, a long drive, and a long service in the cathedral. But the saying, *Man Must what Woman Will*, was made for Clari.

Yes—there could be no doubt about it. Clari, in the unseen teacher of Celia, had recognised more clearly than with eyes the husband of Noëmi. It was a matter upon

which she could not be deceived. She knew every style and fashion of song, and that of Andrew Gordon stood first and alone. Every note that Celia had sung at Hinchford had been drilled into her own ears, and into hers only, and by only one man. The girl might be the daughter of John March, organist of Deepweald, and Andrew Gordon might have been dead and buried years before she was born ; but not even impossibilities can alter facts, and the existence of at least one vampire had been notorious in the Ghetto. Why might not Andrew Gordon have been a vampire indeed, according to the speculations that she had thrown out aloud to Walter ? Her first impression of his magic power had never left her ; and if he were a brain-vampire, feeding on women's lives, all would be clear. She shuddered as she thought what her bambina's fate might have been, with a monster for a father.

Poor little thing ! She knew it was dead, and that was all. The only message, since his desertion of her, that she had ever received from her husband was : ' You need not trouble to look for the child. You will never

find her on this side of the grave.' And that could only mean that she must wait to meet the bambina on the other side ; for, if it lived, how could she fail to find her child somewhere in the world ? And that solitary message was more than twenty years old now. But if Walter was deceived, and if Andrew Gordon was not dead, but still lived, and if he was here in Deepweald with another young girl in his clutches, no wonder that she had attacked her cold fowl with such energetic appetite—it was hunger for revenge. But that is a bald way of saying it. Clari had more than one woman in her. She was more, even, than a mother who had been cruelly plundered of her only child, and had been unable to forget in twenty years of diamonds and flowers. That was enough ; but she was also the jealous, waning queen, who had seen her rival—a rival sealed and sanctioned by the man, dead or alive, to whom she owed her crown. And that was more than enough ; but, as if any element of possible hate were lacking, this same consecrated rival in the queendom of song had destroyed at its very outset the first blossoming of possible love

and peace, all the sweeter for being late, that she had ever known.

A florid, well-fed man in black, just on the point of ceasing to be young, bowed to her in passing her on his way from the organ-stairs down the nave.

‘Who is that?’ she asked the verger.

‘The organist, your ladyship.’

But ocular demonstration had not been needed to prove to Andrew Gordon’s slave and victim, wife and widow, that the organist of Deepweald was not a vampire.

CHAPTER XII.

FECI SURDUS.

ON a certain Monday, the 15th of June, Andrew Gordon, full of self-contempt for the triumph of Comus, had resolved to devote his life to the composition of a great work which should be the embodiment of all art thenceforth and for ever.

On Thursday, the 23rd of March—twenty-six years later—John March wrote at the end of the score ‘Finis.’ The work was done.

A work indeed! It was the whole of a strong man’s head, and heart, and soul. It contained not a chord, not a note, that did not contain the best and the whole of them all. ‘Finis’—after the concentrated devotion of the zeal of youth, the sustained

energy of manhood, the pathetic solemnity of the crowning labour of age. To write the word 'Finis' was like self-inflicted death. Who cannot imagine for himself what it means? It was hard to convince himself that he could do no more. His first impulse was that of triumph—but his second was to feed the flames with his score. Pride, and love, and strange inconsistent hatred for the work of his own hands possessed him, and, till he lighted his pipe, made him tremble and turn cold with the feeling that, at last, the one work of his whole life was done. Hence-forward the score, which was himself, was delivered from his own hands into those of destiny.

What had not the work meant for him? It was as if every note had been a drop of his heart's blood, every chord a piece of his brain—as if, now that all was over, he had no heart left and no brain. It was as if he had transmuted himself into the pile of manuscript, which lay—finished—before him. It had been the whole of his outward life, and the whole of a hitherto unrecognised inner life besides. He could remember the origin

of every phrase, and renew the labour by which he had reduced the inspiration of passing moods of feeling into one consistent whole, in which no slightest trace of any passing mood might be discerned. For the work was to represent bloodless and pulseless art, not to reflect the man ; whatever blood and pulse it contained was to be purely and utterly its own.

Did he regard it with affection or with hatred, as he sat over it and smoked slowly, and turned over the pages lingeringly ? To answer that, one must learn to distinguish between self-love and self-hate—which no man has ever yet done, or ever will do. Who, when middle age is passing, can bear to dwell with approval upon every note and every chord of the score that his life's hand has written ? Only, most lives are written with pencil upon slates, that are sponged over from time to time ; his in sounds, fixed upon art henceforth indelibly.

Hitherto, ever since he had first met Noëmi on the Corso, he had treated, or rather looked back upon, life as a dream, from which the Score alone stood out as the one reality in a

world of shadows. But now, from the pages before him, looked out the ghost of one evening when he saw the then unknown name of “Mademoiselle Clari” among the theatrical announcements of the gazette for that day.

He used now and then to go to the opera, out of a musician’s habit, though he never took his wife with him. She had been consecrated to art. And surely if any man ever had a right to order any woman’s life, it was he. He had taken her from the Ghetto, and worse—from *Il Purgatorio* and *La Purgatoria*. He had trained her to be Empress of Art—which is higher and more glorious, surely, than to be a mere queen of song. He had given her a woman’s full life instead of a slave’s. He had given her luxury for penury, and had only asked in exchange that she should live happily and peacefully; that she might, at the cost of a little labour, be the grand instrument for insuring the triumph of artistic right over inartistic wrong. That was his point of view; and it was just, and generous also, beyond all question.

As for who Mademoiselle Clari was, he cared no more than he knew. One does not distin-

guish butterfly from butterfly, and it might well be that many a prima donna was famous without his knowing anything about her, even by name. When he went to the San Gennaro that evening, it was with the expectation of hearing a voice, and nothing else—and that not necessarily a voice worth hearing.

The eyes, indeed, never see but what they expect to see. They expected to see Lucrezia Borgia, and they saw her. But no disguise could deceive his ears.

There was but one great voice on earth for him ; and he heard it now—it, and no other. A voice never has a twin, even if in other respects Noëmi might have her double somewhere. The second note was enough to tell him that all his precautions had been in vain—that marriage itself had not proved a bond strong enough to keep Noëmi out of the whirlpool, and his work with her. It was more than hard—it was cruel. The commonest gratitude should have been enough to make Noëmi gladly and thankfully docile, even if she proved unable to catch one breath of his inspired enthusiasm for the triumph of the cause.

He did not exaggerate what had happened. It was not merely that his wife had openly defied him. His heart had unwittingly begun to know her well enough, and had already learned that he had to deal with an instrument, glorious indeed, but with no more genius or enthusiasm of its own than a violin ; that such soul as she had was no more connected with her voice than it was with her eyes. He had been building his house all this while upon the sand—upon diamond-dust, rather. How had she come there ?—how had she found means to defy him and art together thus insolently, face to face ? But it mattered not how—she was there, and he had lost her.

He could do nothing, however, but sit and listen to her, in the temper of a great artist who hears his favourite violin degraded by base hands into an instrument of torture. His own teaching was being turned against him, and would henceforth, he knew very well, be used to ensure the triumph of the wrong over the right—he had been devoting years of patient zeal to arming the enemy. He had discovered her, trained her, conse-

crated her for worse than nothing—he had let loose a very Queen of Harpies.

And then, and not till then, he knew that he loved her with all his heart and soul.

It was a terrible discovery ; and, but for her rebellion, it would never have been made. The man had never loved a woman in his life before ; and though he was her husband, he had never suspected that it was for love he had married her. He did not even know how to love, or to interpret what he felt, or to distinguish love from anger and scorn. Self-contempt poisoned the discovery. What was he to do ? Accept facts—give way to human passion—and throw his purpose to the winds ?

Many a far wiser man would have had no doubt about the matter, and would have transmuted the poison into wholesome wine by giving it full heart-room. But then, it is not wise men who consciously devote their lives to anything but themselves. Nobody ever thought Mahomet, or Columbus, or Palissy the potter, a wise man. It was not of his will, but of his nature, that if his heart was ever to come between himself and his

art-conscience, then his heart must go, self-hating, to the wall. It was natural he should love her, for she was in effect the work of his own hands. Whatever soul she had she owed to him. As he sat in the theatre and felt her voice thrill through his veins with unknown fire, he dreamed for the first time of a life apart from art, such as a man may lead. Was it not more than enough to have looked for a voice and to have found a whole woman?

Little knew Noëmi what was passing in her husband's mind. But it is not wonderful that his dull frown failed to paralyse her as she half hoped and half feared. No wonder that, if it had any mesmeric influence at all, the newly-discovered feeling that hid itself under the frown inspired her. At last he could bear no longer to sit there, and feel himself falling into slavery. He did not wait for her last note to escape from the house into the open air.

What had happened? How could he tell? Was it he who was the machine after all, to whom she had given a soul, and not, as he had fancied, she who had received one from him? And what sort of soul would he receive

from her? There was nothing, he felt, between her becoming all his, and his becoming all hers; and to become all hers meant the sacrifice of all he held worth living for, for the sake of what—so he told himself—was a contemptible passion, though the girl was his wife and the mother of his child. What had he done? He had, for art's sake, consciously sacrificed name, fame, fortune; he had hidden himself from the world that he might bring a living voice into full harmony with his life's purpose; he had thought nothing of marrying a stray girl from the Ghetto, and cutting himself off from all other ties; and now it was all to end in his—loving her.

And he was her husband, after all. He had no more power over her, he knew, now that she had once escaped into the fatal atmosphere of the unreformed stage. She had never understood him; and now she had placed an impassable gulf between herself and the least chance of comprehending him. His waste of life had been evil enough, but the shadow of love was absolutely terrible. The only course open to him was to break the mockery of a bond that held them to-

gether, and to escape from the shadow while there was yet time.

Not only must he fly, but at once ; he must not wait for her to return from the opera, flushed with insolent triumph, to conquer him twice over. He could not trust his own strength ; love always feels like weakness when it comes with shame. It mattered not what else might happen. So far as she was concerned, she would be left free to lead her own life in her own way—prime donne are not in the habit of starving. And, as for himself, all he had to think of was his work and his mission—he would have felt the same if it was a question of saving his soul. What is a man's trumpery soul, he would have asked, compared with his work ? Let him do his work ; there are plenty of souls to be saved without the need of mine ; and if it's lost, what is one more or less among so many ?

So much for himself and for her. And that would have been enough, had it not been for a third party to the bargain—the bambina.

The pursuit of art certainly becomes a

complex business, when nature takes it into her head to interfere.

It will have become clear by this time, that Andrew Gordon, however skilful an artist—and even supposing him to have genius—was nearly as ignorant of nature as if he had never been born. It is true that the Lancashire brooks had told him a few musical secrets ; but he had learned just as many from his father's spinning-jennies. In short, he had come to regard the great round world as a gigantic musical-box, and all that therein is, himself included, as so many stops and keys. Nor did he stand alone in his view. Millions fully believe it to be nothing but a colossal market-place ; thousands treat it as a public-house bar. There are hundreds of worthy men, artists in their way, who can only regard it as a sack of soot, or a heap of dust to be carted off the premises ; and thousands upon thousands are persuaded in their inmost minds, that men and women, nay, even the sky and the sea, were made to be written and rhymed about—and for no other purpose in the world. At any rate, Andrew Gordon's craze was no greater than any of

these, but it was no less ; and when he found himself in his progress suddenly face to face with undisguised, sadly inartistic nature, he felt himself in the strange waters of an unknown sea. Love had revealed itself to him as a terror, as the ruin and destruction of his whole theory of life, and of all that it meant to him. How would he be able to face the desert of laborious life that lay before him, without the daily companionship of the girl who had become an essential part of more than his life—of his life's work—and who had now gone out of it for ever ? For it never occurred to him that any course was open to him but escape, at any cost, from all risk of life with her. The man who had been capable of throwing glory from him as if it were a loathsome weed, was just as able to treat the flower of love after the same fashion—more especially when he had mistaken the flower, and when it had turned out to be a full-blown red rose, instead of the expected camellia, that has no perfume of its own.

But still—all this is not the bambina.

Once more nature had stopped the way ;

and by no possibility could art be induced to decide the matter. By no possibility could his work or his purpose be affected, this way or that, by the poor little creature lying cradled at home, while its father and mother were diligently occupied in making themselves miserable. What was he to do with what God had given him, as surely as brains and a heart—though the latter, indeed, had come a little twisted out of the mould ? He had never had much time for looking at the child, but he could not help looking at her now. She had her mother's eyes ; it was a strange, weird, pathetic sight to see the eyes of Noëmi looking out from the grave face of a baby. What was he to do with her ? It was not so much love as indignant pity that showed him the future of a prima donna's child, and that prima donna—Noëmi. The bambina, and the bambina's eyes, became strangely important things to him, now that he was about to drive the mother out of his life for ever. That Noëmi was already in the whirlpool of all evil, he was assured ; she was in other hands than his ; and what better was to be expected from a Ghetto Jewess, who

spent her life in praying for a shower of diamonds, and had left even her baby untended to gain them? Well, let her go—his consciousness of loving her only deepened his anger and his scorn. But he could not find it in his heart to let her eyes go with her.

‘She has all she wants,’ he thought harshly. ‘But she shall not kill two lives instead of one. No, nor one even. I am but as I was before I saw her, and was fool enough to mistake a voice for a soul. I have not lost many years; I can begin again. But it was I who have done the mischief; if I let her ruin an innocent life, the sin will be mine; and it will be more than a sin. No—whatever comes, your mother shall have no child of mine.’

It was of that evening that John March was thinking as his eyes watched the last crowning chord of the great score—written, at last, from beginning to end. It was strange to feel that it was actually, absolutely done; the great work of twenty-five years, that had absorbed his brain, filled his heart, pervaded his life; for whose sake he had surrendered fame, and thrown away love, and had dreamed

and drudged until he had become a mere fossil. And the voice that should by right have sung it—the hateful voice from which he had fled, lest he should love it too well—came back with the last chord to his deaf ears, that would never hear one note even of his own music—well, his ears would never hear the songs he had made for her sung by any meaner voice than Noëmi's.

Had it been worth giving up the whole of a man's life, even his daughter's love, for the sake of music that he would never hear? He had never thought of such a question before—but—now that it was done?

Well, it was done. The music could never be unmade, nor the years brought back again. Fame might come to him at last with honour; but love he had killed with his own hands. But he would give up twice five-and-twenty years, and twice that, and go through them all twice over in the self-same way, if but once the musician's sense could be restored to him, and he could hear with the ears of his body the triumph of art, and the singing of the whips as the money-changers were scourged from the temple.

But that would never be. Worn out, deaf, unloved and forgotten, he would go out of the world ; but he had done his work, and that would live after him. Once more he took up the pen, and wrote at the end of the work :

‘Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped . . . for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. *Feci Surdus,* Andreas Gordon.’

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

MIDAS.

THERE is a story somewhere of a man who was at once the richest and the poorest man in the world. He was the owner of a diamond; not of a common brilliant, but of one that would have glorified the crown of an emperor, one of the great stones with historical names, such as the Mountain of Light, or the Ocean of Splendour. According to the rules used by the dealers, it would have been dirt cheap at I know not how many hundreds of thousands of pounds; so that the owner of it was a capitalist of the first water. And yet he would have been richer

had the stone been sheer paste in a gilt setting. Neither purchaser nor pawnbroker could afford to look at such a monster of value ; and so he had to starve.

The story is not the less pathetic for being probably untrue ; and, indeed, it is no more untrue than any other fable. It is for ever the greatest jewels that bring in the smallest dividends. Nobody ever yet found honour or honesty paying callings, for, whenever honesty becomes policy, it ceases to be honesty.

And so it was all very well to write 'Finis' at the end of a work that was intended to take the world by storm, for the reason that it was based upon the foundation of containing no single element of popularity. Indeed it was so well to have written 'Finis' that the word seemed to mean the very end of the whole matter. The work had been done ; and nothing now remained but to put it away into a drawer, and fulfil its destiny by lying there until 'Finis' should be copied into the last page of the last volume of the world.

It had been written, not in Deepweald, but in London, where, beyond all question,

‘Finis’ is written to more labours and more hopes than even upon the road to the North Pole. John March had duly received his salary ; and, as he had clearly foreseen, the sum had lasted long enough to finish the score. And, had he died at the same moment, all would have been well. Unhappily, like the man who calculated his proper term of life from the insurance tables, without a single error, and then divided his capital into so many parts as there were years, he somehow forgot to die at the right time. There was his work, there was the world, ripe and ready for marriage. But the world was just as deaf to his fiat lux as he was to every voice, even to that of Celia ; and as Celia herself was blind to the whole life-history that had been taking place under her very eyes.

Lord Quorne’s cucumber had won the prize, and Lord Quorne was a proud and happy man. Much to the relief of his wife, who little knew the reputation she was leaving behind her in Deepweald—for, thanks to her non-appearance at the cathedral service,

Gaveston's credit had been saved—the household left Hinchford and returned, though at an out-of-the-way season of the year, to Park Lane. Clari had been blown away by one of those winds that were always blowing her about the world in Prosper's company. Walter Gordon had gone back to his studio in London.

But he had not come back just as he had left it. Contrariwise from him who had gone out to look for his father's ass and found a kingdom, he had gone down into the country for no less a purpose than to paint the portrait of a real countess, and had found—what he found out when he came back to his studio and found it empty of everything but self. Self reflected from the mirrors in Venetian frames; self thrown into the realities of tobacco-pipes and the affectations of a semi-amateur; and, finally, self in the midst of it all, and regarding self in all these things—and all of them, even self itself, unspeakably small.

‘Why, in the name of idiocy, should I bother my head about the girl?’ he asked himself, half crossly—quite crossly was still

beyond him—as he stood with his back to the fireplace, and smoked with new energy. ‘It’s absurd ; and it puts one out of temper. Why the deuce do they sell cigars that won’t draw ? I’ll try a pipe—a pipe’s a philosopher, and makes one think sensibly. She’s pretty ; very different to what she was at Lindenheim. And it’s the best sort of prettiness that comes afterwards, like a second thought of Nature after she’s old enough to do her work well. And there are, I suppose, three hundred pretty girls in the world, only counting the ones I’ve seen ; so that’s nothing. And even her eyes are no more fit to compare with Clari’s than my nose is the Apollo Belvedere’s. They’d be better eyes, though, to look at in the long-run. One does get tired of reading books that have a new puzzle in every page one turns over. There’s such a thing as monotony in variety. Well, she certainly isn’t over-clever, either. And a Lindenheimer isn’t like to be sung off his feet any more than chaff is likely to catch an old sparrow. I don’t know anything about her, except that she hasn’t a penny, and that her father is a—— Well, I won’t flatter him,

and I can't think of a bad name in French, English, German, or Italian that wouldn't be an outrageous compliment to him. For aught I know, she may take after her father in temper, lunacy—everything but looks, thank the gods. Though how the mother of a pretty girl ever came to take up with such a misshapen brute is beyond all understanding. It's Talleyrand's impudence turned into a compliment with a vengeance. Let me see. I've seen her just three times—not counting every day for a year at Lindenheim—once in the street, once at her house, once at Hinchford. What a life for a girl! To be shut up with a deaf bully at Deepweald. It's lucky for her she never had the ghost of an ambition—she never had brains enough for that. But, after all, a girl's a girl. It mustn't be, and it shan't be. After all, it is but right that one should let one's head bother itself a little about a fly in a beer-jug, or a moth in a candle. One does get tired, I suppose, of never bothering one's self about anything. Clari won't, and Lady Quorne will forget; and if there's nobody else to help a lame dog over a stile, I suppose I'm in for it. So here goes.—Come in!

Ill-temper was so unfamiliar to Walter Gordon that, with his love of novelty, he rather liked the sensation than otherwise. His mind was of anything but a sentimental cast, or he would hardly have compared any girl to a lame dog or a fly in a jug of beer. And he was obviously right, from a reasonable point of view, in asking himself why he should let more than half a thought run upon a girl of whom he knew nothing, but that he had flirted with her for a year à la mode de Lindenheim ; which means even less than à la mode de salon, if possible. For in Lindenheim Platonics were not only believed in, but practised to the spirit as well as to the letter, strange as it may seem to those who have, out of Lindenheim, ventured upon that seductive experiment and failed with the usual ignominy. But can ill-temper ever be a pleasant sensation ? Not wholly. But ask the young plants, when they are grudgingly, and as slowly as they can, being forced by some unknown power out of the warm earth into the bleak air of early spring, if they would rather return into their shelter. Probably they would make no answer, but only

keep on growing until, some fine morning, the real, warm sun told them what they were going through all this pain for. Their entry into life is sullen and hard ; but they never dream of growing back into themselves again. Does any one ever feel the first needle-pricks of love quite willingly, unless his skin is rendered callous by custom ? To bear its stabs and its blows is easy enough, and sweet enough too, for most of us ; but they never come till the pins and needles have been changed into clubs and lances. It is in the needles and the pins that the stings lie which will make even the wisest of mortals feel a little conscious of feeling like a fool, or even the most foolish, who are far less given than the wise to feeling like fools. And the result was that Walter Gordon said 'Come in ' a little sharply.

His studio was public property ; so it was not wonderful that he should have visitors within ten minutes of his arrival. Indeed, ten minutes very seldom passed at any time without a visitor of some sort—of every sort indeed except buyers and dealers. And he was fortunate enough to be able to dispense

with these. So open was his studio, that some half-dozen men never quite realised that it was not their own, save in the matter of rent and incidental expenses. And so, in addition to its natural attributes as the hobby of a well-off quasi painter, who could afford all the properties nearly as well as Lady Quorne herself, there had grown up all over it an accretion of everybody's goods and chattels, in the shape of foils, odd pipes, and the multiform litter that Bohemian loungers generally manage to drop behind them. For he was an amateur Bohemian, and was therefore as the quarry whom those good honest fellows, the Bohemians proper, regard as legitimate prey. And, indeed, what business has a man with money to trespass among men whose profession it is to use the pockets of others ? For there never yet was an honest, jolly dog who was not ready to spend or lend ; and to do either he must as largely have borrowed, and never repaid.

There were three visitors on this occasion ; and they respectively represented three aspects of the career of that rolling stone who was named Walter Gordon. One was—of

course—a painter who had been in Rome ; another, a young doctor who had studied in Paris ; the third, a rising pianist from Lindenheim. Oxford and Jena were not represented ; but that was merely accidental.

‘ May we come in ? ’ asked Green, the painter, with elaborately timid humility. He was a small man, with the set, inward smile of one who is always on the point of making a joke and spends his lifetime in the process ; for the joke never comes. He did not affect the outward and visible signs of genius, but rather took advantage of a face grotesquely ugly enough to make the fortune of a low comedian, to set up a reputation for brilliant humour pending the actual delivery of the magnificent epigram that was still in embryo.

‘ Come in ? Why not ? ’ asked Walter, nodding to his three friends collectively.

‘ I didn’t know but what you might draw the line at duchesses—that’s all. But if I may, I will.’ Bohemia is always severe upon those who associate with lords and ladies ; even in Republican Bohemia, envy is not altogether unknown.

‘ Duchesses ? ’ asked Walter, without in

the least appreciating the sarcasm, and groping a little for the possible epigram that might at last have found its way into the world. ‘No—I give it up. Come in, all of you. You won’t find any duchesses here. I’ve only just come back myself. What’s the news?’

‘Fancy a man coming to London for news?’ said Green.

‘Well, I have none. I’ve been down at Hinchford, Lord Quorne’s place, where all the talk was of cucumbers. Don’t ask me to touch salmon for ten years to come.’

‘And where is Hinchford?’

‘Hinchford? About a dozen miles from Deepweald.’

‘Deepweald—Deepweald? Why, that’s where Lucas is gone,’ said Lawrence, the pianist from Lindenheim. ‘A lucky fellow he is, too. I saw him just before he went down. Did you come across him?’

‘No. What should Lucas be doing at Deepweald? And how should I know? I wasn’t in the place more than three times. But all Lindenheim seems to have been gathering together in Deepweald.’

‘ Why, who else did you see there ?’

‘ Oh—only Miss March, Fräulein Celia. She lives there,’ said Walter, carelessly. Somehow the name of Celia seemed to have gathered a new significance, since he had left its owner a hundred miles away, so that its pronunciation became a kind of event that must needs draw conscious notice. He was vexed with himself, both for the sensation of tender sweetness in the five little letters, and for having mentioned her at all before any one who could not concern her. For the first time in his life, he made a conscious attempt to change the current of a talk ; and, being utterly unpractised in such small hypocrisies, he failed. The name ‘ Celia ’ seemed to have stopped the way to other words.

‘ What—your old Lindenheim sweetheart ?’ said Lawrence. ‘ By Jove, I had forgotten her. But I remember her—she used to practise eight hours a day, and rest herself by practising. We don’t seem to have invented gunpowder yet, we Lindenheimers ; and yet there are enough of us too. Yes, I remember that girl ; a plain, shy little thing, who never got into scrapes, and lodged at The Golden

Lion. Perhaps she and Lucas will make a match of it—who knows? What a queer thing it is to meet an old sweetheart, aus Lindenheim! When I was in Berlin last spring, I met Fräulein Ilma, whom I was in love with over head and ears, and ruined myself for her in violets and chocolate almonds—or was that you? Yes, by-the-way, it was you that used to make Ilma eat too many bonbons; it was Lotte that I—no, that was you, too. By Jove, Gordon, you were a regular Don Juan in those days.'

‘On n'aime plus jamais, comme on aime à vingt ans,’ sang Walter, recovering all his good temper, out of very shame at the desire he felt to add Lawrence, at one blow, to the rest of the litter, and to make him a model for some picture of ‘Floored.’ ‘Let the dead past bury its dead. I saw a more interesting woman than any aus Lindenheim.’

‘Ah, the duchess,’ said Green.

‘No—the queen. The queen of song—the newspapers call her so, when they don’t call her La Diva. Not that she’s much of a diva, unless divas swear. Clari.’

‘Clari!’ said Lawrence, turning up his nose.

‘Yes, Clari. She was staying at Hinchford ; and I’ve been trying to paint her portrait. She’s the very strangest woman—yes, you may sneer your German sneer, Lawrence, but Green and I have been in Italy, and we know what we know. Italy is the Niobe of nations, and the land of song. I’ve read that in the newspapers a hundred times. We never turned out a Clari at Lindenheim. I should like to have seen her there. She’d have been an eaglet among the——’

‘Blackbirds, and the thrushes, and the nightingales. Eagles don’t sing.’

‘Don’t they ? But they can make short work of those that can. Well, what are we going to do ? I’m fresh from the country, remember, and don’t feel inclined to do nothing. I have a month’s arrears of wild oats, and cucumber on the brain. Let’s go somewhere — anywhere. And first, let us dine.’

It is of course quite impossible that a man should feel all the signs of love for a woman after seeing her just three times. And, being utterly impossible, it is, like all utterly impossible things, the very commonest of all

things in the world—the only commoner things being that once and twice should be read for three times. And one of the first signs and symptoms is that the patient should cling with all his might and main to the old habits and ways that he feels, in spite of himself, to be slipping from under him. Neither Green, nor Lawrence, nor his silent medical friend, Muir, would have attracted him in ordinary times ; each was a bore in his way, and to be tolerated only. But to-day—on his first return to his normal life, with Celia on the brain, or on the heart, or whatever the organ might be—he felt the self-defensive instinct which leads a man to seek safety from himself in the company of his fellows. He honestly did not wish to think of the girl in Deepweald, who was as much outside his life as if she had been in Kamtschatka.

‘And that is a verra sen-sible pro-pos-ee-tion,’ said Muir.

It was the first word he had spoken since he had entered the studio. And it was absolutely appropriate, if there is the least truth in the theory that a man’s face and speech are in direct antagonism. He and Green were a

direct contrast. If the painter was the humourist without humour, Muir was the philosopher without philosophy. From Green one looked for jest; from Muir, for wisdom that never came. He was a tall, dark, saturnine-looking young man, with dreamy eyes and firm lips—that formidable combination to all believers in physiognomy. He rarely spoke, and, when he did, he never said a word that was worth saying. And yet there was an impressiveness about him. Whenever Green said, ‘Good-morning,’ people grinned; when Muir said, ‘Good-night,’ they felt themselves somehow wiser than they were before.

‘And then?’ asked Walter.

‘Where is Hinchford?’ said Lawrence, ‘that you ask, “And then?” Comus, of course.’

‘What, Andrew Gordon’s Comus?’

‘I don’t know of any other.’

‘If Comus is to be heard within a hundred miles, why it’s the only English music in the world.’

‘Anyway, it’s the one thing now. Don’t they take in *The Times* at Hinchford?’

‘They take in *The Gardeners’ Chronicle*.
But I read all the other papers years ago.’

‘Comus, then?’

‘I shouldn’t be my uncle’s nephew, else. Is it a first night?’

‘A twenty-first, more likely. Do you mean to say you don’t know that Comus, revived, is the rage?’

‘No, but I don’t wonder. It’s splendid music, it made me want to be a musician. I never heard it done. I’m only afraid of one thing, that it’ll make me want to be a musician over again.’

‘When are you going to be a Royal Academician?’ asked Green, suddenly.

‘I? I don’t know. When are you? Why?’

‘Because when a man has tried everything and done nothing they call him an R.A.’ said Green. ‘It stands for Refuge for Artists—or else Run out All round. Let me see; you’ve tried learning, law, medicine, philosophy, music, painting——’

‘But never Comus. Come and dine.’

Celia, in third-floor lodgings, was writing

on a scrap of brown paper with the stump of a pencil :

‘ Six—shillings—left—what—are—we—to—do ?

For all answer, the composer of *Comus*, the most famous musician in all England, placed his finger upon the ‘ *Finis* ’ of the unmarketable score.

‘ This,’ said he.

Celia sighed, and tried to prove to herself that six shillings were six shillings, and six-pence more. She had never heard of the man with the diamond, but there he sat and smoked ; and wherewith was even his pipe henceforth to be filled ? And the diamond might not be a diamond ; it might be nothing better than paste, after all.

CHAPTER II.

SIX SHILLINGS.

IT certainly was time that something—anything — should be done, thought Celia. Surely no promise that she had ever made to her father in his most despotic mood could excuse her from turning to account every means she had of saving him from downright starvation. She could not be ignorant of the suspicions of a doom, worse even than deafness, that had of late been current about him in Deepweald; and though she herself was incapable of facing the—the thought of madness for him—yet—well, the possibility of it accounted for many things. His morose and secluded life, his avoidance of society, even before he had become unfitted for it,

his devotion to one idea as exclusively as if it were downright monomania, his profound faith in a triumph that seemed farthest just when it ought to have been nearest, his strange hatred for the name of Clari, and his capricious command that his daughter should have no communication with Walter Gordon, all pointed in one way—as no one need be an expert in lunacy to be aware. Otherwise—what could it all mean? She could not keep the dread out of her heart, however strongly she might bar its entry into her mind.

Unspeakably she longed for a friend—and she had none. Not one. Lindenheim, with its butterfly friendships, had faded out of her life, or rather had fluttered through it, and died, moth-like, after its little day. She missed the rooks' caw and the cathedral shadows—her oldest friends ; and they could not have helped her. But they represented help ; for they represented Deepweald, where the people had kind hearts, and where she might have picked up a livelihood by teaching. But her father, in pursuit of his triumph, had cut himself off, even from

such aid as might be taken honestly from the Swanns and Gavestons.

Where should her heart turn but to the only friend she had ever known, or was likely to know—the man to whom she had promised to be a stranger? What she wanted was not so much a helping hand, but a clear brain that knew the world, and could tell her what to do in the great world of London, as well as in the little prefatory one of Lindenheim. Whatever we may think of Walter Gordon, to her he was still the wisest and brightest of all human beings; and not only because she had known none that were wiser or brighter. She could not forget how at Lindenheim, so long as both were there together, he had made her feel that she was not alone; how after he left she trusted to the belief that there was still sympathy floating somewhere about the world; how, when she met him by chance in Deepweald High Street, the old sensation of trust had come back, and how she felt for a moment that all would be well, now that Herr Walter had come back into her life again.

Was John March a great man, or a great madman ? Walter Gordon would know. Was the score a wonder of the world or a monstrous chimæra, a lifelong nightmare ? Walter would tell her. Was she bound to a promise that implied starvation ? None could solve that question of casuistry outside the confessional but Walter. How can two people live on a capital of six shillings ? How can works of unknown composers be brought to a public test ? How is that giant, called London, more terrible than any in Cornwall, to be met, fought, and conquered, single-handed, by a young girl ? What could be done—how could anything be done ? Walter Gordon could no doubt solve each and all of these questions and a hundred more. But, alas, she was as much cut off from him by the facts of life as by a promise which, after all, might prove binding. Facts are not made of pie-crust, whatever promises may be.

And then she thought, with the bitterest sigh of all, supposing even that she broke her promise and went out to search for him in the great wide world of the Post-office

Directory, what had she to do with him, or he with her? So far as facts were concerned, he might be in Sahara and she at the North Pole. They had not even the paradoxical meeting-point of extremes. He was rich, a companion of earls, countesses, and song-queens; the old sweet liberty, fraternity, and equality of Lindenheim had no place in the world. And if it were not so, it was a fact that, after Lindenheim, he had forgotten her as completely as if he had never seen her. She was becoming conscious of having never lost a certain fool's dream, born, perhaps, in the Rosenthal, in which girls are not inapt to indulge, and all the more when they do not know its name. She felt as if a bright young knight, in white armour, had ridden past a maiden chained to a rock, had gladdened her with a moment's flash of hope, and had then, without even seeing that she was chained, ridden on, and forgotten her as if she had been only a chance peasant-girl sitting by the wayside. Perhaps life would have been a little less sweet for the want of the vision, but it would have been infinitely less bitter.

Is this an over-romantic way of putting the case of a somewhat stupid girl and a young man who, to say the least of him, was a little scatter-brained? I do not say that Celia March would have suited every man—a girl with none but the narrowest professional culture gained from the narrowest of callings, who had passively drifted downwards without a fight for it, and whose dowry was but a fraction of six shillings; nor that Walter Gordon would have been every woman's hero. The worst of story-telling is having to face the fact that, when love comes in, one has to ask for sympathy for two people who would not care for one another very much, unless they fell out of sympathy with all the rest of man and womankind. How else should they be in love, if you please? Every woman wonders how and why Mary should be a heroine to John, every man marvels that John should be a hero to Mary. And so the unfortunate couple become unheroic, just in proportion as they become heroic to one another. And if He and She, instead of coming together according to nature, go wandering about in unconnected sets of

curves, never meeting, except by chance, and blindly, they have not even the consolation of stepping out of the great world, where they are so infinitesimally small, into the wonderful world which is so small as to have no room to spare for more than two.

Of course there can be no sort of doubt as to what Celia ought to have done. What is the use of an introduction to a countess if one makes no use of her? She had actually eaten and drunk at Hinchford. But, somehow, it never struck her that to have been introduced to a stranger gives one an instant right to demand help. She would far sooner have appealed to Deepweald Tower, which, indeed, to any one who had been brought up among the Swanns of that city, was not nearly so high above the earth as the Countess of Quorne.

And so, at last, the poor girl sat at the uncovered deal-table in their third storey, face to face with all the barren rocks of life, and trying to prove that six are seven, and that a madman may be trusted to find a gold mine; while her father sat in an apathy of triumph before her, listening with deaf ears to a burst

of future applause ; and while the flowers of a girl's life were growing up frost-bitten. She had, for weeks past, had ample time to brood ; for the task of house keeping, such as it was, had been growing lighter and lighter. Her last feat in that direction had been to reduce six shillings and twopence to six shillings, by buying a pair of candles, one of which was now burning down into its brass socket. The room was as poor and empty as any in Saragossa Row—a waste region not far from Lambeth Palace, where the natives, against all the laws of hygiene, seem to increase and multiply, with no apparent want of health, upon the foulest atmosphere to be found along Thames' side. I have made no attempt to trace the career of the ex-organist from the pure air of the Cathedral Close at home to the suburbs of Lambeth Palace. It had been the gradual dead-weight sinking of two people, one of whom will not, and the other cannot swim, or even make those floundering efforts that at any rate give some éclat to the process of going under water. No ; it cannot be said that Celia had risen to the occasion.

The candle guttered down and down, lower

and lower, while Celia's heart kept sinking down and down with it, as if in sympathy, and her father brooded over that unhatched egg of his, and sent out slow clouds of tobacco-smoke over it that were only too typical. Anything like conversation between the two was so utterly impossible—for scraps of brown paper cannot be held to count—that, to reverse a sentence of Sir Richard Steele, they were as sad as in solitude and as constrained as in society. Saragossa Row was mostly quiet about midnight; for the nearest public-house was in the next street, and the more industrious natives were either asleep or else far abroad upon their unlawful occupations. The house itself was quiet. It was a baker's, where work did not begin till five o'clock in the morning, and their only fellow-lodger, who 'kept' on the second-floor, was a man of marked and regular habits—that is to say, he was regular in being scarcely ever at home. The people of the house, the baker's family, were always in bed at ten. So there was nothing to disturb the maestro's dream of art and glory.

But suddenly Celia was startled by a most

unprecedented tap at the door. There is character, even in door-tapping, and this was polite but firm. She waited for its repetition before she said, 'Come in.'

John March knew nothing of this, and so did not turn round. If he had, he would have seen a tall, harsh-featured young man, meagre and rather gaunt, looking as if he were manufactured out of bones fastened together with wire and whipcord. He was dressed negligently and roughly, but like a gentleman—that is to say, in such a fashion that the eye did not notice the clothes, but travelled straight to the man in them. And, for that matter, there was little doubt about this nocturnal visitor being a man. He wore a wide-awake hat, of a fashion that has now travelled into the Church. He removed it, as a matter of course, when he found himself in the presence of a young lady.

'You'll excuse me?' he said, in a broad northern accent, which sounded to Celia's ears like the creaking of a rusty weather-cock, only deeper in tone. 'Mistress Snow has forgotten to leave out my candle; could

you oblige me with a light ? I lodge on the floor below.'

Celia knew of the existence of the second-floor front, but had never met him, even on the stairs. And he was not exactly of the Saragossa-row type, that had now become familiar to her. She looked at him a little timidly, thought of the twopence she had just spent in two candles, went to the cupboard, and offered him the reserve stock of her purchase.

Meanwhile the second-floor front stood in the doorway, making his observations quietly—supposing him to observe anything.

' You are quite welcome,' said Celia, lighting the new candle at the dying flame of the old. She felt that the stranger was watching her attentively. He took the candle and lingered. Celia was no more of the Saragossa-row type than he—less so, one might say, were it not that in the waters of London one oftenest meets people exactly where one would least look for them.

' Thank you kindly,' he said, with a rough sort of respect which made Celia notice for the first time that the stranger was probably

—making allowance for his more rugged type of build—not much, if at all, older than Walter Gordon. ‘After all, I’ll just take a light for my pipe, if you won’t mind one whiff this side the door. No, you won’t mind that, I see,’ he said, seeing the curling cloud above the score. He hesitated for a moment. ‘I’ve lived in the Latin Quarter, where we used to get on without getting somebody to tell us our own names and then boo-ing just as if we’d been told one another’s. And it’s my own opeenion that fellow-lodgers ought to be friends or enemies. And indeed that’s my own belief about all men, that if one’s neighbour’s down one ought to pick him up, and if he’s up one ought to knock him down.’

Celia, as she looked at him, thought him fully capable of doing either, if he pleased.

‘And so I’ll give ye a piece of advice in return for a pipe-light ; and thank you. It’s ill wasting one candle while another’s burning; so I’ll e’en take the scrap you’ve got left. I’m not a fine lady, to want an hour of tallow to get into bed by. You are French, ma’m’selle ? Then I’m all the gladder to have you for a neighbour, and I’ll give ye another advice

grahtis--don't count your shillings in Saragossa Row without locking yourdoor. Mistress Snow is a good woman so long as ye keep a key for your whisky; but I doubt if she's much used to see shillings, and it's ill to tempt a wife with seven bairns. There's not much a man or a woo-man won't do if there's nobody in the room but old Nick, and he, and a sixpence; that's a bad congregation—self, and sixpence, and the de'il. Are you long in this country, ma'm'selle ?

The old candle had guttered so far that even a young Scotchman, let alone a fine lady, might find it hard to win the race to bed against the flame. Nor was there any reason why, if he only wanted a pipe-light, he should linger at the door, talking nonsense in a slow drawl, as if on purpose to linger the longer.

‘No,’ said Celia. ‘We are English.’

‘Ah! Well, we can't help where we're born; it's not given to every man to be born in Paris or Aberdeen—more especially Aberdeen. You ought to be French by your looks. And now——’ He cleared his throat, and said in the loudest, fiercest of his strident

tones, 'Twice two make five, and that I'll maintain against any man.'

Celia shrank back in alarm and looked at her father, but he had evidently not heard a word ; he did not even know that a stranger was in the room. The visitor was mad, or he had kept his whisky only too securely from Mrs. Snow, and had deposited it where no keys are required.

'As a post !' said the strange stranger, in a kind of smothered growl. 'How long has he been like that ?' he asked abruptly, looking round the room.

Celia trembled ; but suddenly the eyes of the stranger came back to her from their travels, and all her fear went away. And yet they were cold, steel-like eyes, as different from Walter's as flint from flame.

'Yes—as a post,' he went on. 'There's naught but a post wouldn't turn round when a man flew in the face of the multiplication-table like that—if he's got the ghost of a fight in him. I know what I'd do if a man had come into my room that gait, and if he'd thrown his inkstand at my head, I'd have said guid-night, and been in bed by now. So

I'll just tell you, as ye look like a lass with a bit of brains, that I'm neither a madman nor a sot, but just David Muir, surgeon, and that I look on the human ear as just the finest bit of work in all the microcosm. Is it your father? Then,' he went on with enthusiasm, 'let me congratulate you on being dochter to the finest case in Britain. I never knew a man deafer—except one, and he was cured by Maurel, of Paris, so well that they made him a mouchard: for he's got such a deaf look on his face, that nobody thinks of talking in a whisper when he's by, and all the while he can hear a pin drop—I knew the case; I was a pupil of Maurel, who was just the best aurist in Europe, as you doubtless know. Is he dumb?

'Thank God, no!' said Celia, her heart giving a leap at the thought of a possible cure, and not speculating upon how it came to pass that a man, who styled himself surgeon, should be lodging in Saragossa Row.

'Ah,' said Muir, shaking his head with a slightly disappointed air. 'Then that simplifies things sadly—sadly. I'm afraid we must light the other candle after all. How

long has he been like this ? What is he ?

‘Who are you ?’ asked John March, suddenly turning round.

Muir looked down from his height into the worn face of the ‘case,’ as a lover might look into the eyes of his mistress—supposing the lover to have eyes as cold as ice and as keen as steel. To those who knew him there was no need to ask how it came about that the young Scotch surgeon, as odd in speech and manner as he was skilled of hand, should be buried in Saragossa Row. Nobody ever accused him of meanness, though he lived for the present upon somewhere about ninepence a day, and took lodgings at Mrs. Snow’s for the simple reason that they cost him next to nothing. Even so he had lived while studying in Glasgow, and so in Paris, and so now in London ; and always for the same reason, that he spent every farthing he could spare upon a fund wherewith to pay the creditors of that bankrupt draper, his dead father, twenty shillings in the pound, and that he had far too good an opinion of himself to throw himself away upon any sort of practice

below his highest ambition. But this is not the story of David Muir, which belongs to quite another sea of strange waters.

‘Guid-night,’ he said, lifting his wide-awake in French fashion to John March before he again put it on his rough hair. ‘Tell him what you please,’ he said to Celia, ‘except what’s true. Hope’s just a snowball—the more ye roll it the more it grows, and the more there is to melt away.’

‘But you said——’ began Celia, her heart sinking again.

‘I said I’ll cure him if I can. But ye know, or ought to know, it isn’t the surgeon that cures. I believe a little more than we used to learn from Maurel. Guid-night. I’ll see ye the morn.’

‘Who is that?’ asked John March, following the surgeon with his eyes, as if he meant to drive him by a look from the room.

‘Only—the—other—lodger,’ wrote Celia. ‘He—wanted—a—light——’

John March shrugged his shoulders impatiently. What had that to do with the score? What have trifles to do with great things? What have they ever had to do with them

since the world began? A squabble about an apple had nothing to do with the burning of Troy, as every schoolboy knows.

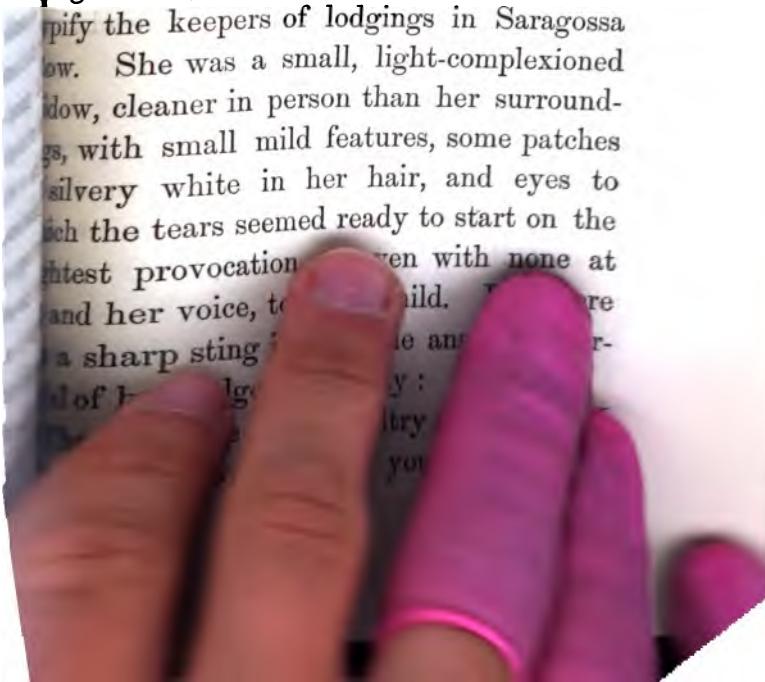
But Celia was not thinking about the score. More and more it was being borne in upon her, that the great work which had crushed the heart out of her childhood, which had been the self-devouring soul of two lives, was nothing more or less than the craze of a fevered brain. Not even his own child, who had been brought up in the faith, believed in the man's life-work, to which he had sacrificed name and fame, self and life, wife and child. He was doomed to sit like the mummy at his own feast, the statue on his own tomb, wrapped up in soundless solitude in the temple of art, that he had been building with a life's labour for a careless world to worship in; he had nothing left but to dream in barren apathy, and with henceforth idle hands, over that 'Finis,' which was in truth the end. But Celia was not thinking of this—a phase of life into which she had not been born to enter. Muir had filled her with hope of a far other kind. If her father could only hear! Then she could, at least, put a little

Fortunately there was still food enough in the house to last them over the next two days. The wolf was heard howling, but not quite at the door. One day, bleak and bitter as it was, was gained for thinking, and that was something. In one more day there would be no time for thinking at all.

She ran over in her mind, while coming down from her attic, all she knew of the after-lives of her fellow-students in Saxony. What in the world had been the use of all her elaborate training, only for the purpose of doing her poor powers of justice to a dream and a delusion, as she was now more and more convinced that the great work had been from the beginning? And if so, perhaps She was not to be kept from being sane for ever. But then how on earth was she to begin? London required teaching, no doubt, but she was as little en rapport with the confession as her father was with the theatre audiences. And—were it otherwise—would come to look for her in Saragossa. When she came into the sitting-room, she heard her father's voice deepest, and most familiar, lady,

'I see from this account that we are in your debt, and that you wish to be paid. Of course you will be paid. I don't see why you should be so especially anxious to-day. Let me see, what is the amount? Twelve shillings and ninepence. Celia! Pay Mrs. Snow, and don't let me be disturbed. These people never know the damage they may do with their paltry concerns. If the score had not been finished; and even now, who can tell when a thing is finished? Never, any way, if one is to be troubled in this way.'

Mrs. Snow was very far removed from being a *virago*, such as might be supposed to qualify the keepers of lodgings in Saragossa now. She was a small, light-complexioned woman, cleaner in person than her surroundings, with small mild features, some patches of silvery white in her hair, and eyes to which the tears seemed ready to start on the slightest provocation. Even with none at hand her voice, though child-like, was a sharp sting in the anatomy of human pity: and you



March, no, nor how Miss March gets hers ; but I know how I get mine. It's by letting respectable rooms to respectable people. And my idea of respectability is people that pays their way. If I was rich, I'd take in as many as liked to come, and nothing to pay for board nor lodging—nor extras. So I must ask you to settle, if you please.'

Celia's heart sank in her. Twelve shillings and ninepence ! Was it possible ? And not half the money in her purse, and even that forestalled. And yet how could she confess it, and how could she bring herself to face Mrs. Snow ; a worse development of that unpromising day than even she had feared ? It was the first time she had realised what money means, as none can till they learn what is meant by having none. Is it possible for one man to tell another what is meant by the first grinding crash of his life's boat against the granite of poverty ? It sounds as heroic as a shipwreck ; it may be so talked and written of as to seem absolutely sublime. Poverty, as we all know, is the nurse of genius, the mother of action, the sister of honesty, the wife of honour, the mistress of

philosophy. Yes—but she keeps her heroics for the ears of those who hear of her. She speaks to those who hear her living voice in the stinging pipe of Mrs. Snow. Who ever felt in the land of romance when he owed twelve shillings and had only six wherewith to pay ?

The organist, no doubt, had lost all account of money, as he had of time. Since the score was finished, he was in a hundred ways, even in Celia's somewhat dull sight, a changed man. He seemed to have become so much one with his work that, when he had written 'Finis,' he had put the same infinite word to everything, and to have fallen into the posture of one whom nothing concerned any more. The doing of his work had represented time to him ; its future, eternity. And eternity was not likely to trouble itself much with the daily dirt and dust, actual or metaphorical, of Saragossa-row.

But what was Celia to do ? Rise to the occasion, of course—that is everybody's first duty ; just as much as it is to have tact in one's dealings and presence of mind in danger, and always to make wise plans and

to compel them to prosper in the teeth of destiny. She took out her worn-out purse, a relic of Lindenheim, timidly.

‘Mrs. Snow——’

The tears welled up into Mrs. Snow’s eyes.

‘I thought so, Miss March,’ she said shortly. ‘I knew I had only to speak a word——’

Instead of rising to the occasion, Celia only coloured crimson.

‘Indeed,’ she said earnestly, ‘I didn’t know—I thought I knew everything we owed—but I am so bad at sums. Here are six shillings; that is all we have, my father and I.’

The tears did not go out of Mrs. Snow’s eyes, but they flatly refused to fall, and one remained suspended half-way.

‘You didn’t know what you owed? And you’re bad at summing? Then all I can say, and more I can’t, is that it’s lucky there’s somebody that can. I dare say you’d do summing quick enough if there was somebody owed you money. There, you’d better try to add up this bill. It’s right enough,

but it'll be as good as a lesson. I've no patience with people that can waste their time over singing a parcel of songs, and don't know what they owe. Nobody ought to sing till they're debt-free, say I. Catch me so much as whistling till I owed ne'er a penny. Not that I mean I'd whistle at any time, for I wouldn't, and it's low.'

John March, as his manner was, turned his back on talk and took up a pen.

'I've known people before him,' went on Mrs. Snow, raising her voice from soprano to treble, 'and many that wrote for their living; and I know it's to be done. A young man I had last year that wrote all the fires ; and he did so well that it's my opinion he made 'em. Leastways, there never was so many after he went to New Zealand. But he never so much as set fire to my chimney. So I knows that it can be done. Why don't Mr. March go out and see the fires and the fits, and all like that, instead of poking in here over a desk ? There isn't much to be seen out of the window, except the cats and the children ; and there ain't much to write about them, I should say. And then there's Mr. Muir.

He's never been a day behind, and has a lot of books ; and he don't pay his rent by sticking indoors, not he. He goes out and about, like a man ; and I know it's honest work he does, for he's never been a day behind with his week's rent since he was born—not that I knew him so little, for he's been a six-footer ever since he came to the Row ; but the child's the father of a man, and you may be sure he was born punctual, and if he had to pay rent for his cradle 'twas paid. Yes, miss, for his cradle. There's many a poor woman hereabout that's glad to do it when she's out charing, or what not, and if you want to find lodgings without rent you must take a coffin ; I don't know of none other. So there !'

Celia sank below the situation farther and farther. She had never even seen such a thing as a quarrel. She could only half hold out her purse and wish wildly, like the helpless creature she was proving herself, for the presence of six feet of manhood, or even for Walter Gordon's share of them.

‘ My father is deaf,’ she said, as if his failure to run all over London in search of fires, or to commit arson for copy's sake, required apology.

‘Ah, yes ; deaf people can hear quick enough when they’ve got to be paid. But you’re not deaf, Miss March. So you look here, if you please. It ain’t my way to be too particular, but when there’s young men in a house it’s my duty to look after ’em ; and young Mr. Muir’s as respectable as he’s high. He was up here last night well-nigh two mortal hours. I was in bed, but I heard him going on ; and I’m not going to see him lose money that he wants to pay his rent with, and keep respectable. What he may do out of doors is no concern of mine ; but what’s spent in my own doors comes to me, and in duty bound.’

Celia set down her want of comprehension to fright, so far as she made any effort to comprehend anything but that she was expected to turn six shillings into twelve.

‘No ; I’m not particular. I don’t ask anybody how they get their living so long as they pay their way. But when rent isn’t paid up, then duty’s duty, and I’d ask an angel out of heaven how he got his living, and if he didn’t answer to satisfaction, I’d

know the reason why. How does your father get his living, Miss March ?

‘ He is a musician—that is——’

‘ He don’t play any music.’

‘ He is deaf, and——’

‘ Ah, yes. None so deaf as those that won’t pay. And how do you get your living, miss, if I may be so bold ? I’ve heard you singing, as I said before. Do you belong to the theatres ?

‘ No.’

‘ I thought you might be a singing chambermaid out of a situation, that’s all. But anyhow your father can’t make much money by music if he don’t play, nor you by singing if you only sing to your shadow. Shadows don’t pay much, I reckon ; or there’d be fine pickings on a sunny day, and fat’d be a fine property. So, you aren’t a singing chambermaid ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Then I say you ought to be. I mean to say you ought to be anything rather than let a widow wait for her money. Yes, miss—I know what I know ; and what I say is, that a musician that’s deaf and a young girl that don’t

do nothing must live somehow—for people must eat, even if their landladies is to starve ; for it's a selfish world. And though I've noticed that landladies aren't by near and far up to lodgers in selfishness—I don't mean landlords of houses, for they think of nothing but their fixtures and their quarter-days—other people must eat too, even if they do happen to let lodgings. And therefore you don't get butchers' meat on trust, I know ; and so the long and the short of it is, you and me part company, for I'm not going to have Mr. Muir's morals come to hurt here ; and I'm not going to keep lodgers that aren't straightforward ; and I'm not going to be behind with my own rent, whatever you may be with yours. Therefore,' she said plaintively, while the fountain of tears opened freely, 'you'll take a week's notice from me ; and, if you stay to the week's end, you'll please to do for yourselves.'

So saying, she wiped her eyes and slammed the door. And none can slam doors so effectively as weeping women, who are small and mild. In a virago, it looks like nature ; but in **Mrs. Snow**, it looked like desperation.

Celia was fully aware that she had failed ignominiously to hold her own. No doubt Mrs. Snow had justice on her side, though she dealt it by hard measure. But still Justice, hard as her hands needs must be, need not be insulting. And what, she asked herself in despair, had Mr. Muir's visit last night concerned Mrs. Snow? Neighbours had been neighbours, both at Deepweald and at Lindenheim. She had thought the young doctor as good-natured as he was odd, and he had given her at least one night's dream of hope and courage. And yet, even she had a dim suspicion that had she been able to settle the bill off-hand, and given satisfactory proof that her purse had not run dry, Mr. Muir might, if he pleased, visit her twenty times a day. Knowledge of the world was slow in coming, but it was likely to come quickly enough now. Poverty may be the mother of heroism, and all the rest of it, but she is, in her own person, knowledge of men. And of women? Possibly; but it may be doubted if there is such a thing anywhere.

She wrote: 'Mrs.—Snow—says—we—
are—to—leave.'

‘Again?’

For some reason or other, they had already shifted quarters about a dozen times.

‘What—are—we—to—do?’

‘Go elsewhere.’

‘We—have—only—six—shillings; we—owe—Mrs.—Snow—twelve.’

John March looked down upon the great work, then up at Celia, and frowned with thought. The man seemed to have been relapsing into a mere machine, and to be incapable of such will even as was needed to set the wheels of his mind moving. For five-and-twenty years his brain had been strung up to fever-point; and the loosened string meant reaction, which meant prostration. He had been thinking of one great thing for so long that, when he had to think of it no more, he had forgotten how to think of smaller things—for such were the common needs of life to the man who had lived for an idea.

‘You mean we have no money?’

‘None.’

He filled his pipe carefully, lighted it, and sent out slow and vigorous clouds. He was

in sober fact the man who starved because he owned a priceless diamond. That little room contained—if Mrs. Snow had only known it—the one great work of the century, the one man who could make it, and the one woman who could do it justice; so he still believed, for he at least believed in his own sanity, though all the world might conspire to call him madman. He tried to think; and though the thoughts came as slowly as the smoke-clouds, he at least was conscious of no less vigour in them, nor did it occur to him to draw closer comparisons between pipe and brain in the matter of cloud compelling.

There were his kinsmen in Manchester. He had a moral claim on them; for had he not enriched them by his forfeiture of a share in the business, in order that he might hide himself abroad and marry a Roman beggar-girl? His sole inheritance had been the conventional shilling; and even that sum, hitherto unclaimed, would be welcome now, as a sop to the wolf at the door. But how could he, who had given up all things for Art's sake, go, beggar's cap in hand, to fat and prosperous relatives who—if they believed his identity—

would surely tell him that as men sow, so they must reap, and as they make their beds, so must they lie. If a man will not be a rich man, he can hardly expect his relations to save him from being a poor one—and it was not in John March to say to a tradesman, ‘I have failed.’ And who would believe even that he was he? No—Andrew Gordon was fairly dead and buried, and must not be revived in men’s eyes simply as a man who had been cut off with a shilling for a fool’s marriage.

But for Celia’s sake? No; not even for hers. She had no claim. Her very existence was a blunder; and though a fool may ask for help—unless he be a proud, and therefore a double fool—he can hardly make his follies a burden for others to bear. For once, a man would not make his children’s sake an excuse for doing what he would not do for his own.

Nevertheless, he had brought her into the world. He did not sigh as he looked at her; one of his father’s looms would have been incapable of sighing. But it had never occurred to him before that, when he had carried off

the child from its mother, he had been making himself answerable for something more than the tuning of a musical instrument. And he had time to look now, though his eyes were a little less clear than before they had devoured black dots and their tails day and night—and, yes ; she had her mother's eyes—the eyes in which he had seen a voice five-and-twenty years ago. Would it have been better to have left her to the mother after all ? It was his first weak thought ; and it came with 'No' for an answer.

Still, he had not trained her to starve. And what was he to do, deaf, prematurely old, with his life exhausted in one effort, and with no more knowledge of living men than a child ? And what made his thoughts move like creaking doors ?

In effect, the door actually creaked open.

'Mr. March,' said Mrs. Snow, 'here's a letter for the young lady.'

Was she the same woman ? The eyes were as ready to weep ; indeed, they were actually brimming over. But she spoke gently, even pleasantly, for a voice in Sara-

gossa Row, where tongues get spoiled by scolding. She held a letter in one corner of her apron, as if it had been brought by Mercury himself instead of the postman.

A letter for Celia ? It was strange. Who should write to her ? Bessy Gaveston might have done so : but then Bessy Gaveston had never heard of Saragossa Row.

Celia read it twice over ; then she handed it to her father.

‘ Dear Miss March,’ he read, ‘ I have a musical evening on Thursday. Pray oblige me by coming, and singing what you please. I particularly wish to renew our passing acquaintance at Hinchford.—Yours faithfully,
—A. QUORNE.’

What could it possibly mean ? It was from the countess, sure enough—it was dated from Park Lane; and bore a coronet on the cover. But how could Lady Quorne have heard of her, or remembered her, or cared for her ? How could she have found her out in Saragossa Row, and why ? It was a mystery beyond all ravelling.

John March frowned deeply. A week ago he would have said ‘ No.’ But he felt

that his right to Celia's life had gone. He could not give her bread by way of Art's wages.

' You must go,' he said roughly.

Celia looked at the note—desperately. It might mean doing something ; it could do no harm. And she wanted somebody, anybody, in the shape of a friend. But, alas ! there are more reasons than one for not being able to accept an invitation to humbler houses. Her father might bid her go, but a more powerful tyrant than he said, ' No.'

It was the cracked mirror over the empty fireplace ; and it said to her what the cruel sisters said to Cinderella : ' You go to a ball ? Why, you haven't even got a gown !'

John March frowned more deeply than ever ; though it could not be supposed for an instant that such troubles were legible to his eyes. He left the room and went to his own garret upstairs. Mrs. Snow lingered. Could she by any possibility have known the contents of the letter ? She must have guessed, and sympathised.

' I know the most respectable people's

short at times,' she was beginning ; ' and as to Mr. March, he's short by nature. But I'm not a hard woman, miss, to them that's willing, and—'

John March came down again, carrying in his hand the last possible thing that could possibly have been looked for in connection with him. It was a mantilla of black point-lace, that even the most ignorant could tell was of value enough to cover a multitude of sins, and to have paid at once ten times all the rents in Saragossa Row. Mrs. Snow touched it timidly. With a plain black dress, dark hair, and southern eyes, it would make an eccentric but yet perfectly orthodox costume for an artist ; and—

' Bless me, if I can make out those Marches !' said Mrs. Snow, later in the day, to Mrs. Hale, of number twenty-three. ' They don't eat enough, nor drink enough, and one'd think they were as poor as Job ; but they get letters from ladies with coronets in Park Lane, and keep lace things that the pawnshop'd give a quarter's rent for. I know. P'raps the old gentleman's a fence. But there's worse lodgers than fences ; and maybe the

young woman won't come back from Park Lane empty-handed. I had a lodger once that forged ; and he was the best that ever I knew. Anyway, I'll keep them on as long as they've got that thing, and welcome ; and if they're doing a duchess, it's too good a pie not to have a finger in.'

Whence it may be concluded that Mrs. Snow possessed an art much cultivated by some foreign statesmen, of knowing what is inside undelivered letters, and of taking their measures accordingly.

CHAPTER IV.

HUNGER AND HERESY.

WHEN Muir went to bed, without a candle, he was much too pleased with his day's work to take much heed about the arrangement of his clothes upon their proper chair. For days and days past he had been trying to find out the means of introducing himself to his neighbours. But it was not because he was a young man, and because a good-looking girl lodged overhead and, far too often, disturbed his studies by singing. So far as she was concerned, he cared nothing. His taste in music was confined to a sentimental enjoyment of about six Scotch tunes, and he was not rich enough yet to afford to take note of whether a girl's eyes were black, blue, or gray. On his young shoulders

was set a very old head indeed ; he had not been in love since he was seventeen, and since then had given himself no time or thought for follies. A girl might be interesting ; but then she must have something the matter with her, and be attractive as a case, and not as a girl. Helen herself in health would have had no charms in his eyes. But he had long been hankering after the deaf musician, and at last Mrs. Snow's neglect to leave out her model lodger's candlestick had given him his opportunity.

As a pupil of Maurel of Paris, and as an enthusiastic believer in that great surgeon, he had a special taste for the morbid anatomy of the more sensitive organs, where the nerves act so subtly, so obscurely, and yet so intensely. The ear, in a state of disease, had a sort of fascination for him, just because it is so little comprehended——perhaps one may say so incomprehensible. And there was no manner of doubt but that his fellow lodger was as deaf as a stone. Muir dreamed all night, not of Celia's beautiful eyes, but of her father's deaf ears ; an odd dream for a young man who had eyes in his own head,

but of the right sort for one who has his own father's debts to pay. And usually he did not waste time even in dreaming. He used to take concentrated essence of sleep, in a dose of five hours, before beginning a working day of five-and-twenty. I say it advisedly ; for one of his working hours was fully equal to two of an ordinary Southron's.

The fact is the case had fascinated him, because it had puzzled him. He was unable to get at the core of it even by imagination, which is the genius of the physician. There have been deaf musicians, though not frequently. There was Beethoven, for example —only Muir knew no more of Beethoven than Beethoven of Muir. But this particular musician was so especially and exceptionally deaf, and all the while, when he looked or spoke, had such a look of hearing. There is a physiognomy of deafness ; and the great Maurel had a theory that different forms of deafness may be diagnosed by their special physiognomies. The acute might be told from the chronic forms by a glance ; but acute could be distinguished from acute, and chronic from chronic.

And yet, all the while, though he did not know it, it is more than doubtful whether the young man would have taken quite so intense an interest in the elderly man, had it not been for the combination of a pair of very bright eyes with a dim and dying tallow-candle. If we knew anything about ourselves, we should be marvellously wise.

They were very poor, or else they would not have been his fellow-lodgers at Mrs. Snow's in Saragossa Row. And no wonder, thought Muir, that a musician, as deaf as a stone, should be out of an engagement, while the daughter was far too pretty to have a chance of earning her living honestly. He would make another professional call, and that shortly. Meanwhile, he breakfasted, as always, on a huge basin of porridge, went to his morning's work, and forgot everything, as a matter of course, except what he had to do.

But he put on and took off his thoughts as easily and regularly as his clothes ; and, for recreation and rest, he took out John March's case from the mental pigeon-hole where it had been carefully stowed away for reference

at odd minutes. When dinner-time came, he first took a brisk walk to get an appetite, and then managed to find himself in the neighbourhood of Walter Gordon's studio. That was rather a habit of Walter Gordon's friends—towards dinner-time. There is no particular need to suspect Muir of sponging. A glass of sherry, a biscuit, and a cigar are not much to sponge for; and they saved Muir from the expense of many a fuller meal when pence were low and fasting imperative by the rule of Saint Lazarus—a stricter rule than ever Franciscans or Carmelites obey. And if Walter Gordon every now and then, guessing the state of affairs, asked him to go out and feed somewhere with him, he would have been worse than a sponge to refuse—he would have been a fool.

Walter Gordon was standing before his easel when Muir entered. He did a great deal of work in the way of standing before his easel.

‘Well, old fellow,’ said Walter, ‘what’s the news in the medical world? I half wish I had stuck in it, sometimes,’ he went on, with a dissatisfied look at his canvas. ‘It’s some-

thing real, any way—there's a great deal of reality about an amputation ; and there is humbug about art, as I've heard Clari say, of all women. The fact is, Muir, I don't know what to do, except have a weed. Will you ? And there's the sherry. No ; I don't know what I'm fit for. I've been lawyer, doctor, philosopher, musician, painter ; and the end of it all is that Nature beats me in making such a thing as a woman's nose.'

'Nature's a clever woman,' said Muir, sententiously.

'I hate clever women,' said Walter.

'She's just too clever by half,' said Muir, with dogmatic decision. 'I think ye'll agree with me, that if a man contracted to make good noses, and he turned them out in the shapes of Nature, ye wouldn't employ him again. And I tell ye that a decent surgeon, that knows his trade, would turn ye out a better piece of humanity than Nature does, though she's been at the trade, they say, five thousand years, and hasn't a rival. Think o' the way she brings us into the world, and then how she sends us out again ! There's no man would be able to do it all ; but no

man that could do it at all but would do it just twice as weel.'

'You're right,' said Walter. 'Nature made tobacco, but she never made a cigar.'

'And think o' the human ear,' said Muir, the fulness of heart coming into his tongue. 'It's the most exquisite organ ; it's all beauty, from the lobe to the brain. A good clock-maker will make a chronometer that'll last a man's lifetime. But Nature just acts—'

'As if her own was of the longest.'

'Just as if she meant to show she's a cheat and a jade. She'll make a man a painter just for the fun of sending him blind ; and a musician, just to get all the joke out of deafness she can.'

'Yes ; a deaf musician does seem arch-mockery,' said Walter ; 'as bad as a horse without legs, or a swallow without wings. Like what the old German epigram says of a heart without love :

'A lordless land, a sunless day,
A wineless cup, a rhymeless lay,
An eyeless face, a birdless grove—
A heart until it aches with love.'

Muir had as little sympathy with sentiment

as with humour. And hitherto, indeed, any man who came to Walter Gordon for sentiment would have gone away empty-handed.

‘I’ve just met with a most interesting case of it,’ said the doctor.

‘What? Your own, I suppose?’

‘Mine?’

‘I wasn’t quite sure. Nobody ever heard of your being in love; but then you said, “interesting.”’

‘Pooh! Love and all that! What’s that to do with a deaf musician?’

‘I don’t see why not. Musicians aren’t love-proof; and love isn’t bound to go in at the ears. See Ovid, see Burton, see everybody with eyes, *passim*. But, of course, I knew there was a “case” in the case with you. Who is she? As the Sultan used to say.’

‘The girl?’ asked Muir, literally.

‘Oho! There is a she, then?’

‘Pooh!’ exclaimed Muir again. ‘The girl can hear as well as you or I; it’s her father that’s stone-deaf, and I’ll cure him, or my name’s not Muir, or else I’ll fail.’

‘A deaf musician with a daughter?’ ex-

claimed Walter, turning round suddenly. 'Do you mean it? Who are they? What is their name? Why—you've not been to Deepweald?'

Muir was not as yet so far advanced in his profession as to have the habit of diagnosing expressions and tones, or he would surely have seen that there was something in the wind. Walter had too cosmopolitan a training to be the model young Englishman who can see a man who has just seen his sweetheart as calmly as if he were just told that it was a fine day, or that dinner was ready, or that he was sentenced to be hanged in half an hour.

'No,' said Muir, 'I've never been in Deepweald, nor anywhere south of the Border but London—except in trains,' he added for sake of the accuracy that was part of his professional stock in hand. 'The case,' he said, with the faintest deepening of his complexion, 'is in Saragossa Row.' It was brave of him to live there; but he was not proud of it, and therefore was all the braver. The true Bohemian is never vain of Bohemia—though, when he grows old, he may affect

to be, like the fox in *Æsop*, who lost his tail.

‘In Saragossa Row?’ asked Walter. ‘Then it’s clear they’re not the people that I mean. Come and feed. I’ve been working all day, and I’m hungry.’

His work had been to Muir’s like a sparrow’s to an eagle’s—in the same comparison, his hunger was a sparrow’s to a raven’s. The honest sponge was in luck to-day.

‘I suppose it is hard work, trying to make paints look like nature,’ he said, without the least intention of sarcasm. ‘Let’s see what you’ve been doing. It wouldn’t be a bad thing if all you painters would get a surgeon to revise the anatomy, and not make your pictures so that a medical man feels like to faint when he goes to the exhibition. Now there—that neck is—— Why, it’s the girl!’

‘What girl?’

Muir looked doubly grave. ‘The girl in Saragossa Row. I didn’t know she was an artist’s model. So that’s how they live, then. Ah, well! We must e’en all of us live just somehow, till there gets to be more gold in the rain.’

‘That girl is no model,’ said Walter. It was true that what he called work was trying to paint a portrait of Celia from memory, with just a little more success than his now historic failure to put Clari on canvas ; and he knew well enough that it must be Celia herself, and no other deaf musician’s daughter, who lived, or starved, in Saragossa Row. For though he had never been in the place, Muir not being hospitable, he knew very well what living there must mean. John March had been dismissed, then ? They had no means ? What were they doing here, and what would become of Celia with none to help or counsel her, and all alone in the world of London—a far more perilous one than Lindenheim ?

His first impulse was to forget that he had asked Muir to feed with him, to take a cab, and drive straight to Saragossa Row. But he paused. He did forget his invitation to Muir, and even that Muir was in the room ; but he could not forget his reception in Deepweald by John March, and there is such a thing as intrusion upon poverty, which presents a peculiar difficulty to quick imaginations. Muir would have taken a visit from any one of his

friends as an insult, against which his whole thistle would have erected all its prickles ; and, excepting a motiveless call upon Muir, he was without the smallest plausible excuse for going to see Celia. A prince may afford to pardon a trespass upon his palace, or a beggar upon his hut ; but Saragossa Row was just the sort of place where uninvited intrusion is beyond the pale of pardon. Of course he would be able to get at her some-when ; but this sudden discovery of her, and another discovery that he had made some weeks ago, made the some-when look like an age.

Suddenly he thought. He dived into his dressing-room, leaving Muir, who had given appetite leave to indulge itself before a fair prospect of dinner, smoking hungrily. He knew Walter to be of the high caste of Bohemian Brahmins, but nevertheless thought he took an unconscionably long time to wash his hands. However, there was no help for it ; hunger, when it sees its own end, is by no means an unpleasant sensation. But at last, when the minutes had grown to some five-and-forty, his host reappeared—in full evening costume.

‘Are ye going to the opera again?’ asked Muir.

‘No, I don’t think I am obliged to hear Comus more than twice a week, as my poor dead uncle’s deputy. No; I’d forgotten; I’m going to Lady Quorne’s. She has evenings, you know—but I want to see her before the people come. I’m off at once, but you can stay here and smoke as long as you like; I shouldn’t wonder if Green looks in, or somebody. They generally do.’

‘Are ye going to dine there?’

‘No. Good-bye, old fellow. I want to hear about that case of yours. Let me see; I never can remember numbers. What’s your’s? In the Row, I mean.’ It was etiquette among Muir’s friends to drop ‘Saragossa,’ leaving strangers to supply, in their imagination, ‘Bolton,’ or ‘Savile,’ or some equally orthodox name.

Muir’s heart—yes, his heart—sank within aim. It was not that he saw the prospect of dinner floating away on the stream that might have been, but neither he, nor anyone else, had ever known Walter Gordon

to be guilty of such a sort of forgetfulness. He did not even seem to remember that he also had called himself hungry. It was certainly hard.

There is no doubt about it—Love and Selfishness are but two words for the same thing.

But it is not I who am answerable for such pestilent heresy. It is only Muir, who was not in love, but merely hungry, and who yet felt that nothing but love could be the spoiling of a good fellow, and make him forget dinner-time. But there was no help for it—Walter and his dress clothes were off and away. So, like a Scotsman and a philosopher, the hungry man, with one angry sigh towards the unfinished picture of Celia, poured out more sherry, discovered the biscuit-tin, munched serenely, and meditated on all the ills that ears are heir to.

‘So the lass is a model,’ was his only interruption. ‘And the lad’s so gone on her that he forgets his dinner. I don’t see much guid in being born with a silver spoon in one’s mouth if one doesn’t use it to sup

brose with. I'd sooner have the brose without the spoon.'

Nothing of all this accounted for the mystery of the mantilla. But it accounted easily enough for the arrival of an envelope with a coronet upon it in the very unaristocratic neighbourhood of the Row. Muir's compatriot, who speculated on the consequences of our being endowed with the power to see ourselves as other see us, only took a half view of the needs of knowledge. Could some other power give us the gift to see others as we see ourselves, Celia would not have become set down as an artists' model, nor her father as a receiver of goods that were not the lawful property of the depositor.

It had not occurred to Walter Gordon that to accept an invitation to Park Lane implied means of making an appearance there such as were not to be looked for in the Row, or even in all the old-clothes' shops in the vicinity. Like most men of his age who do not chance to be married, he had an idea that young women are like the lilies of the field, and, without having to toil

or spin, put forth silks and laces as naturally as the flowers put forth leaves and petals. Dimly and theoretically he knew that such things have to be bought with money; but he realised it as much as the need of a butterfly to buy its many-coloured wings at Titania's court-milliners. So nothing interfered with his belief in his own cleverness in having brought himself en rapport with Celia without the more than doubtful proceeding of a call in the Row. Nothing was more natural than that Lady Quorne should patronise the local talent of Deepweald and a protégée of her kinsfolk, the Gavestons; and, indeed, Lady Quorne was quite ready to take a satisfactory view of her duties in that behalf.

Walter Gordon did not work much for the next few days, but went about as young men do who are in the first stage of love for the first time in their lives, when nothing definite has happened to tighten the cords of the elastic golden film which afterwards is apt to become so thick and cloudy. That state of the heart, when love is more than liking and less than passion, and yet is sweeter than

mere friendship, is the golden age ; and men would strive to lengthen it rather than to shorten it if they were wise. Walter had no chance of hurrying emotion ; so he spent the next few days in a pleasant lounge through a dream, idealising the Cinderella of Saragossa Row into an enchanted princess, and never thinking for a moment that her dreams were of candles that would burn without growing shorter. One is tempted sometimes to take the burden of heresy from Muir's shoulders, and transfer it to one's own.

At last the evening arrived for him to keep his one-sided rendezvous in Park Lane ; and he was ready for it as early as Bessie Gaveston had been for her first ball. Somehow the hands of his watch obstinately refused to move — the second-hand seemed to mark minutes, and the minute-hand hours. One is not always unhappy when time creeps and cab-horses crawl.

But at last he was fairly in the great drawing-room of Quorne House, where a few guests were already assembled. The first person whom he recognised was one whom he had seen under very different circum-

stances indeed—by the dim, tobacco-clouded light of an alehouse parlour, shivering and wet with wind and rain. Now he was comfortable, portly, and sleek, with hands well ringed and gloved, and a bald head that shone. In a word, Prosper.

CHAPTER V.

PROSPER.

PROSPER in all his glory was not what Walter Gordon had come to see. But he had lived nearer to the rose than anybody else present, for he had once in his life been within some five-and-twenty miles of her—which is the exact distance from The Five Adzes to Deepweald.

‘Good-evening,’ said Walter, more on that account than on any other. ‘It is rather a better climate here than when we last had the pleasure of meeting. I hope you did not get very wet that night, at Laxton?’

Prosper surveyed him for a moment with a grand air.

‘Ah, you were there? No, monsieur, I

did not get wet—I got drowned. It was not rain—it was a deluge. Yes ; it is better here.'

‘When are we to hear Clari again ?

Prosper shrugged his shoulders, and frowned.

‘If you wish to hear of Clari, you will not come to me. I have not the honour to be in the confidence of mademoiselle. I have drowned for her ; but I shall not wash my hand for her—no, never again—no ; not one finger more. She is dead, monsieur.’

‘Dead !’

‘As a sardine in oil. It is equal—she has quarrelled with me.’

‘That is a misfortune indeed !’ said Walter, relieved. For he could less have associated the idea of death with Clari than with daylight, for all that prime donne, even the greatest, have their day, and that even days must die.’

‘It is a terrible misfortune,’ said Prosper.

‘And, if I may ask, how came so clever a woman to be so unwise ?’

‘Souvent femme varie, bien fou qui s'y fie.
La Donna è mobile qual piuma al vento,

muta d'accento e di pensier. Voilà la Clari
—voilà la femme.'

'I should say there are women with fewer
caprices in the world.'

'Caprice!—if that were all! Ah, mon-
sieur, you know not the story. I have made
her—I. I gained her her first *début*. I
have been her teacher, her financier, her
head, her right hand—in one word, her
career. What would she be without Prosper?
A concert singer of the third class, who
would sing pretty well. She is not a caprice,
monsieur. She is an ingrate. She is more
—she is ingratitude. I soap my hands of
her. I soap my hands and my feet, if she
crawls on her knees.'

'May I ask what she has done?'

'I want all the world to know. We are
in Lyons. She sings there—I obtain for her
a furore. Observe—I obtain. We are to
sup at the hotel. It is to be a good supper;
and we are to commence with oysters;
the great green oysters you know not here.
Monsieur, all the world knows that one com-
mences with five oysters if the supper is to be
great and good; not one less, not one more.'

I say so, in passing ; it is a simple aphorism of gastronomy, that one does not say in a *maison de santé*, because there alone one would have contradiction. She contradicts me. She asserts that one should commence with six—six whole great green oysters of Normandy, monsieur. It shows her brain begins to grow weak—I tell her so. It vexes her. She says she will eat twelve oysters if it pleases her. It is an outrage on the first principles of art ; I say so, for it is true, and I know. It is a topic on which I feel strongly—I, who have eaten oysters before she was born. She says, if I eat but five oysters all at one time, she has devoured more ; she says—but no matter. Yes, mademoiselle, I answer—they eat much, who have starved ; if it had not been for me, you had never set one eye on the great green oyster of Normandy. You would be eating stock-fish in the Ghetto, and call it divine.'

‘ Yes,’ said Walter, ‘ I have always heard that France is as distinguished for taste as for politeness.’

‘ It is beyond question, monsieur. It is an insult to the nation that a woman out of the

Ghetto of Rome should contradict a com-patriot of Brillat Savarin. It is not the ques-tion of an oyster, monsieur. It is art ; it is patriotism ; it is philosophy.'

'And what did she say to all this ?'

'She ordered twelve more oysters, and de-voured them—all. And then she said—but no matter. I should have said "Sortons !" if she had been a man. But she shall see.'

Walter Gordon knew that the less the cause, the greater the quarrel ; and that Clari was quite clever enough to make an irreconcilable quarrel over a single oyster-shell, if she chose. He could imagine that a consider-able quantity of gunpowder must inevi-tably have gathered about the relation of Clari and Prosper, which only wanted a spark to explode it ; and the story of the quarrel seemed to imply a good deal that was 'no matter.' However, he had given up speculat-ing about Mademoiselle Clari. His ears were Prosper's, but his eyes belonged to the door.

Prosper went on talking to the door-post—that is to say, to one of those men who, in crowded rooms, have such a natural affinity to the posts of the door as to be indistinguish-

able from them, physically or intellectually. But they have their uses—they are in high favour with great talkers.

‘Yes, my lord; we shall see. We shall have the season—but Clari? Où sont les neiges d’autan? Pouf—Prosper blows; she is gone.’

‘Have you seen *Comus*?’ asked the door-post.

‘Ah!’ said Prosper, but whether approvingly or otherwise, it was hard to say.

‘It’ll be hard to beat that, any way.’

‘No, my lord. Not of the all; all to the contrary. It is English, after all—a *bêtise*.’

‘Yes; France is as famous for politeness as for taste,’ thought Walter. ‘I don’t agree with you,’ he said. ‘I differ from you as much as Clari did about the oysters. *Comus* is the finest opera of the age.’

Prosper smiled—as a grown man may upon the nonsense of a child.

‘Quite right to stand up for your name, Gordon,’ said the door-post.

‘I don’t see why one shouldn’t believe in a work because it happens to be one’s uncle’s. Yes, I do stand up for *Comus*—through thick

and thin. If it wasn't English—if it had been composed by some herr or signor—it would have been one of the works of the world. But we are improving. It is an English work ; and it pays. Even Monsieur Prosper can't say it doesn't pay.'

‘Ah !’ said Prosper again, and he sighed. ‘You are the nephew of your uncle, monsieur ?’

‘I have that honour.’

‘Ah ! it is a pity he knew not Prosper. Is he alive ?’

‘No ; he died—in Italy. But one doesn't expect foreigners to know the history of English musicians. At least, we suppose he died. If he had lived, the composer of *Comus* must have been heard of again.’

‘Yes ; *Comus* pays,’ said Prosper, meditatively. ‘Without question it pays. I should like to know that Gordon—monsieur your uncle, monsieur. He would have liked to know me. I wonder what he does now.’

Prosper was a famous diplomat in his way ; and, like all great diplomats, wasted little labour in concealing the works of his mental machine. Walter could see, without effort, that Prosper had lost more by his quarrel

with Clari than she, and that 'something that paid' was at present his philosopher's stone.

'Ah, if Gordon was alive ! If he has left behind him some work—no ? Ah, it would be the second blow on the nail, and drive him in. Yes ; I would pay well for some English bêtise of Gordon. It would be the rage—it would be the thunder after the lightning ; it would pay—me.' He paused, and thought, while fresh arrivals parted Prosper and Walter from both door-posts, and left them in company on the landing.

'You are your uncle's nephew—vraiment ?' he asked abruptly, after a pause.

'I am the nephew of Andrew Gordon.'

'He has left no work behind him—none ?'

'I only wish he had, and that I were the owner.'

'Think, monsieur. There is no musician but leaves behind him some sketch—some idea. Comus is the rage.'

'It's no good thinking. Comus was the beginning and the end.'

'Ah, you English ! I would find one thousand works of any musician, what you please,

when he is the rage. Are you a musician, monsieur ?

‘ I ?—I don’t know. I was at Lindenheim ; so, at any rate, I have lived with the rose.’

‘ And your name is Gordon ? You can compose ?

‘ I have spoiled some music-paper. Why ?’ Prosper shrugged his shoulders.

‘ You are Gordon—you compose—Comus is the rage !’

‘ Well ?’

‘ Mark me, monsieur. If you bring me some opera by Gordon—some little song, if you please—I shall be happy to make it worth the while. That is all.’

‘ You mean it is something to be even one’s uncle’s nephew ?’

‘ Pardon, monsieur, if I think you dull. If I were the nephew of your uncle—presto ! There would not be one little song. There will be ten—twenty—one thousand ! It is to make hay that the sun shines. What good is the sun, if there is no hay ? If you will look among the papers of your uncle, you will find an opera. If it is not in his desk, it will be in your’s ; if it is not in your desk, it will be in your head, monsieur.’

‘I see. I’ve often wondered how it is that, as soon as a dead man gets famous, he sends down new works from the skies, very nearly as good, sometimes, as the worst he wrote when he was alive. But I can give you a better way than you suggest, by a long way.’

‘Ah?’

‘Revive the real man. He might not have died after all, you know. Discover him—make a romance of him. Make him a victim of the Jesuits, or the Czar ; bring him from Siberia, or the Piombi. Of course, he composed an opera in prison, with a bit of charcoal, on the walls of his cell. You must have a presentable-looking man of the proper age ; say fifty or fifty-five. If he doesn’t know an allegro from a semibreve, write an opera yourself, or get some poor devil who wants money more than fame. Put in a bar or two of Comus, to give the critics some internal evidence to mumble. There ! what do you say to British bêtise now ?’

Prosper was as blind to sarcasm as Muir ; and Walter had spoken as seriously as Prosper.

‘ Ah ! it is an idea—certainly it is an idea ; but where is your poor devil ?’

‘ In England. We are the nation of shopkeepers, you know ; and everything and everybody on earth is to be found in London. Why, there isn’t a back slum where you wouldn’t find a man who wouldn’t call himself any name you like for the price of his keep ; only, let my uncle be decently presentable.’

‘ Certainly, it is an idea ; and I have known such things. I will speak with you to-morrow, monsieur, if you will favour me with your card. Perhaps you will search in your desk a little, my good friend—hein ? One must seek to find.’

‘ Does the fellow really think I’m in earnest ?’ thought Walter. ‘ I’ve half a mind to send him flying downstairs—only it would spoil his shirt-front ; and three-quarters of a mind, anyhow, just to see how far impudence will go. Well, my prodigal uncle has got fame with a vengeance now ; and it is strange that everything that he must have written besides Comus should have disappeared with him from the world. Ah, Fräulein Celia !’

In one moment Prosper and Clari, oysters and impudence, fell out of his mind. His plan had succeeded—Park Lane was filled with a breeze from Lindenheim.

It was just as well that he was at the head of the stairs. Celia had made the journey from Saragossa Row to Park Lane very bravely, or, at any rate, with the blank courage of despair. Her father's daily bread depended on her finding work anyhow; and a lost chance would have been a sin. But, now that she was here, she suddenly felt more lost than when she first found herself at sea in Lindenheim.

And, in spite of all the superlative excellence of Walter's plan, her arrival was none the less a miracle. True, the mantilla had removed the main difficulty of her costume, and more completely than if she had known that people in Park Lane are not in the habit of dressing in that style. And even had she known it, it would have troubled her but little; for she knew only too well what had never even suggested itself to Walter—that, by the time Thursday arrived, not a half-

penny would be left out of the six shillings for a needful pair of gloves and for a cab-fare one way, not to speak of the numberless little things that the most ignorant of girls must have, before she can overstep the boundary between the Row and the Lane. The six shillings did somehow prove a widow's cruse—the widow being Mrs. Snow, who did not choose to have it on her conscience that the correspondent of countesses should starve before that rent was paid, for which a coronet on an envelope is ample security everywhere. Her simple mind was as much impressed by such an emblem as if she kept a great hotel, or a shop in the West-end, where confidence in coronets is the first principle of trade.

But, nevertheless, Celia no more dreamed in her heart of actually wearing the mantilla that evening than she dreamed of turning it into gold—an obvious way of keeping off the wolf a little longer that should surely have occurred to John March long ago, if he had not, indeed, put every last atom of his wits into the score. She could not walk in it alone through the streets; nor could she

enter Quorne House with ungloved fingers. She sighed when Thursday morning came ; but it was a sigh of relief that the dreaded chance had slipped away without any fault of her own.

And then came the miracle. Was she indeed the godchild of a fairy ?

No sooner had she needed a dress, than her penniless father produced from nowhere a robe of lace fit for a queen of Spain. And then, when the robe did not prove enough—lo ! on the breakfast-table lay a box containing no fewer than six pairs of white gloves brought by a messenger who left no message ; not even one from the skies. Yes, though ; a note, in a strange hand, lay on the top of the gloves—a pumpkin, turned into a cab, would call for her at half-past eight. No mention, indeed, was made of a pumpkin, which would obviously have been one of Lord Quorne's own prize cucumbers from Hinchford ; but it must have been a gourd as surely as that the driver would be a transformed rat—the creatures abounded in the Row.

The slipper of glass alone was omitted

from her costume, when she stepped into the magic cab and left behind her her seat among the ashes. Who had sent the gloves ? Lady Quorne could not know her size ; and they fitted her as if they had been made for her. Did they come with the mantilla ? Were they part of that mystery ? But there was no good in wondering, and long before she had puzzled the matter out, her cab was among the carriages at the door of Quorne House in Park Lane.

Thrice fortunate for her that she was dark and dark-eyed, so that she suited the mantilla. Foreign artists were common at Lady Quorne's, and foreign artists may dress as they please, and do not always achieve the supreme taste that Mademoiselle Clari, however she might err in gastronomy, invariably showed in the matter of costume. That a girl who looked like a Spaniard should come in her national dress was not strange there, however remarkable it might be elsewhere ; and the mantilla has at least this merit, that it never looks really out of place anywhere.

But Celia felt terribly alone ; and the old shyness of Lindenheim came back in a flood

over her. She placed herself behind some new arrivals, and followed them upstairs. If only, as on that first day of Lindenheim—

Was every want that day to be supplied—every wish, before it was expressed, fulfilled ? With the ubiquity which at Waaren had seemed to be part of his nature, which had there brought him always, and all at once, everywhere and wherever he was wanted, there he was now—at the head of the stairs, as ready to receive her as if he had been there for the very purpose. By sheer force of habit her shyness left her. And for her, too, a breeze from Lindenheim blew through Park Lane.

‘I am so glad you are come,’ he was saying. ‘I was getting afraid—but never mind. You will speak to Lady Quorne, of course ; and then she will ask you to sing.’

‘But—all these people ! I didn’t know—’

‘The more the better. It isn’t a Lindenheim audience ; half won’t listen, and those that do will think you first-rate, just because this is Lady Quorne’s. And you look—charmingly. So you’ve left Deepweald ?

‘Come and speak to Lady Quorne. I’ll be your chaperon.’

Celia suddenly felt a pair of eyes upon her ; and she felt herself at her old trick of colouring. They were Prosper’s eyes ; and, in truth, they were regarding her strangely, and in a way that might make any girl colour less with confusion than with anger.

‘Mademoiselle is an artist ?’ he said to Walter. ‘ Permit me to be introduced to mademoiselle.’

‘Miss March—Monsieur Prosper,’ said Walter, hastily and ungraciously. ‘Come ; we will speak to Lady Quorne now.’

‘Pardon—one moment,’ said Prosper. ‘I forget not laces—I have met mademoiselle ? In Spain ? In Italy ? No ?

The door was getting crowded, and not easy to pass. Celia remembered the voice well enough—the first foreign voice she had ever heard—a memory of that day in Deep-weald when Clari sang, which would always remain the first among all her memories. What had happened—what had not happened since then ? She had lived ; she had seen Clari face to face ; she had known Walter ;

Deepweald had become a dream ; her father had grown deaf ; the wolf of hunger was upon them ; 'Finis' had been written to the score ; and now she was speaking once more to the man who seemed to have opened the door to all these things, when he let her into the Shire Hall without paying. She fell a little behind Walter's arm. All these things might be, but were no reason why Prosper's eyes should so devour her, from her head to her heels.

But his next words were the last to be expected as the outcome of such a stare.

'Mademoiselle wears lace. It is magnificent, it is exquisite, it is superb, it is divine, it is very pretty.'

'Come,' said Walter.

And Celia, relieved, instead of fearful, followed him through the door into the world of Lady Quorne.

'No ; I forget not laces,' Prosper was saying to the door-post. 'I have met La Mantilla in Spain ? In Italy ? Si ?'

END OF VOL. II.



